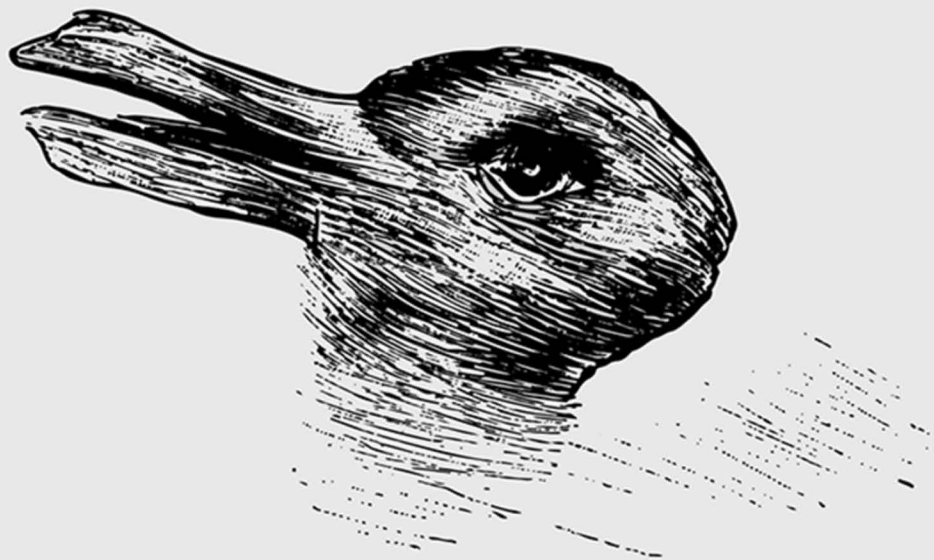


ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY



An Interpretive History

EDITED BY
AARON PRESTON

ROUTLEDGE


ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

Analytic Philosophy: An Interpretive History explores the ways interpretations (of key figures, factions, texts, etc.) shaped the analytic tradition, from Frege to Dummett. It offers readers 17 chapters written especially for this volume by an international cast of leading scholars. Some chapters are devoted to large, thematic issues like the relationship between analytic philosophy and other philosophical traditions such as British Idealism and phenomenology, while other chapters are tied to more fine-grained topics or to individual philosophers, like Moore and Russell on philosophical method or the history of interpretations of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Throughout, the focus is on interpretations that are crucial to the origin, development, and persistence of the analytic tradition. The result is a more fully formed and philosophically satisfying portrait of analytic philosophy.

Aaron Preston is Associate Professor and Chair of the Philosophy Department at Valparaiso University. He is the author of *Analytic Philosophy: The History of an Illusion* (2007) and a number of articles on the history and historiography of analytic philosophy and on the philosophy of religion.

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An Interpretive History

Edited by Aaron Preston

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For Monica Madan,
whose skill in interpreting life has brought me great joy,
and from whom I am continually learning.

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1

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Interpreting the Analytic Tradition

Aaron Preston

This collection aims to examine the role of interpretation in shaping analytic philosophy, understood here as a philosophical *tradition* (more on which shortly). Central to this project is the notion of a *tradition-shaping interpretation*. By “tradition-shaping interpretation” I mean (roughly) an interpretation that was or is crucial to the origin, development, or persistence of a tradition. Some tradition-shaping interpretations interact with the relevant tradition at a relatively fine-grained level, pertaining directly to the canonical figures, factions, views, and texts that comprise it. For example, the logical positivists’ interpretation of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* facilitated grouping Wittgenstein and the positivists together as “analytic philosophers” in a way that would not otherwise have been possible. Thus it indirectly shaped the analytic tradition as a whole: both Wittgenstein and the logical positivists are core, canonical members of the tradition in part because of this early interpretation of Wittgenstein (which most would now regard as a misinterpretation).

Other tradition-shaping interpretations occur at a more coarse-grained level, pertaining directly to the tradition as a whole. For instance, it was once widely believed that analytic philosophy was defined by a commitment to linguistic analysis as the uniquely correct philosophical method and that there were clear boundaries between analytic philosophy, pragmatism, and so-called “Continental philosophy.” But things have changed. No one thinks that contemporary analytic philosophy is committed to linguistic analysis, and historians of analytic philosophy question whether this was a defining commitment of the tradition at any stage of its development. Meanwhile, new interpretations of Quine portray him as a pragmatist as much as an analyst (cf. Godfrey-Smith 2014), thus blurring the lines between the two traditions and causing us to wonder whether they were ever that clear to begin with (on this latter point, see Cheryl Misak’s chapter in the

present volume). Likewise, some have claimed to see similarities between the later Wittgenstein and some prominent themes in Continental thought (cf. Staten 1984, Garver and Lee 1994). Interpretations of Wittgenstein along these and similar lines blur the boundaries between *those* traditions and have raised questions concerning Wittgenstein's status as an analytic philosopher (cf. Glock 2004).

Given these quick examples, it should be obvious that what we nowadays call "the analytic tradition" can to a great extent be characterized as *the result of the interplay of changing interpretations at different levels of granularity*—at the level of individual philosophers and their works on the one hand and, on the other, at various levels of aggregation, from sub-groups within the tradition (such as logical positivism or Oxford philosophy) to the tradition as a whole. This may seem a surprising proposal, not least because characterizing analytic philosophy in this way has a distinctively Continental/hermeneutical air to it. Be that as it may, reflection on the nature of intellectual traditions shows that there is nothing unusual about interpretation playing a formative role. To my knowledge, the most influential understanding of "tradition" in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy (and, for a long time, perhaps the *only* reflectively developed understanding available in the philosophical literature—cf. Glock 2008, 220) comes to us from Alasdair MacIntyre. According to MacIntyre, a "tradition" is "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute the tradition" (MacIntyre 1984, 222) or, more specifically:

An argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition ... and those *internal, interpretive debates* through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted.
(MacIntyre 1988, 12, *my emphasis*)

While MacIntyre did not propose these as descriptions of specifically *philosophical* traditions, they apply to such traditions as well. Specifically, MacIntyre's insight that traditions characteristically progress via "internal, interpretive debates" concerning how best to understand their fundamental agreements fits well with Moritz Schlick's observation that

Every philosophical movement is defined by the principles it regards as fundamental, and to which it constantly refers in its arguments. In the course of historical development, the principles are not apt to remain unaltered, whether it be that they acquire new formulations, and come to be extended or restricted, or that even their meaning gradually undergoes noticeable modifications.

(Schlick 1932, 259)¹

Schlick uses the term “movement” rather than “tradition,” but whatever else a movement may be,² it is the sort of thing that can develop into a tradition. Thus, what Schlick seems to be getting at is that philosophical traditions characteristically begin as socially embodied schools of thought, with members united in agreement over some set of philosophical views or ideas (Schlick’s “fundamental principles,” MacIntyre’s “fundamental agreements”). But then, as adherents think ever more deeply about those views, questions about them arise. To these, differing answers emerge, and along with them an “in-house debate” about what the school’s views *really* presuppose, or entail, or mean (etc.). Thus it is that philosophical schools and movements naturally ramify, by means of interpretation and reinterpretation, into traditions characterized by less ideational uniformity than the original school itself—retaining a core of fundamental, theoretical agreement but exhibiting disagreement over the further details. Thus the history of a tradition will always be an *interpretive* history—a history shaped by interpretation.

There is, of course, more to a philosophical tradition than its fundamental principles. It is *around* such principles that a philosophical tradition (or school, or movement) comes into being and develops, but a great deal of what arranges itself around the principles may become, along with them, *co-constitutive of*, if not also *co-definitive of*, the tradition. For instance, the principles will be conceived by figures who will count as the tradition’s founders and will be endorsed by other figures who will count as its members. Some of these will become leaders within the tradition, either alongside the founders or in the ensuing generations, and will stand out from the rest of the membership as exemplars of what it means to be a member of the tradition. The principles will be stated, explained, examined, questioned, defended, adapted, and, indeed, interpreted, in texts, some of which will come to form the central canon of the tradition. The membership may engage in certain practices, such as holding an annual meeting, or it may establish certain institutions, such as schools or journals or a press, to facilitate the interpretive debates by which their tradition progresses, so that the tradition itself comes to be characterized by those practices. And all of this, happening in space and time, will confer upon the tradition spatial (geographical) and temporal boundaries. Thus, for almost any philosophical tradition, we will in principle be able to identify it not only by its fundamental theoretical commitments but also by its founders, its most important members and texts, its characteristic practices, the times and places in which it originated, thrived, languished, and so on. But this does nothing to undermine MacIntyre’s insight that traditions develop hermeneutically. Rather, all these additional features may become fodder for interpretation alongside the fundamental principles. (For instance, as we shall see, there is currently quite a debate over just who the founders of analytic philosophy really are.)

So it is not unusual that a philosophical tradition should, to a large degree, be shaped by interpretation. What is surprising, however, is that analytic philosophy

appears to have been not merely shaped, but *created*, by interpretation—and a misinterpretation at that. As traditionally understood, analytic philosophy originated around the turn of the 20th century in the work of Moore and Russell, in a revolutionary break not only from British idealism but from traditional philosophy on the whole. This break was predicated upon the view that a novel philosophical method—namely, linguistic analysis—had been developed, and upon corresponding methodological and metaphilosophical views to the effect that linguistic analysis was the uniquely correct method for philosophy, and that philosophy, insofar as it is a legitimate enterprise, is itself nothing more than the analysis of language. This “traditional conception” of analytic philosophy is represented in a number of works from the early 1930s through at least the early 1970s.³ It turns out, however, that the traditional conception is radically false. As historians of analytic philosophy have been pointing out since at least the 1990s, neither Moore nor Russell—nor, for that matter, Frege—endorsed the linguistic view of philosophy or of philosophical analysis.⁴ Thus, analytic philosophy has *never* exhibited fundamental agreements about fundamental principles, not at any time, and certainly not over time.

How, then, did it come to be believed that a philosophical tradition (or school, or movement) corresponding to the traditional conception of analytic philosophy existed in the first place? My view, which I have argued for extensively elsewhere (Preston 2007), is that this was the result of misinterpreting Moore and Russell (and later Frege) in ways that created an “illusion of unity.” Others have noted the role of illusory phenomena in the history of analytic philosophy. As early as 1958, Geoffrey Warnock wrote of the analytic tradition as having generated a “revolutionary illusion” (Warnock 1958, 1). More recently Michael Beaney has used the term “creation myth” to characterize the once-popular view that analytic philosophy was born in the linguistic turn (Beaney 2013a, 23). He borrows the term from Gerrard, who used it to characterize the view that analytic philosophy was born in a revolt against idealism (Gerrard 1997, 40). And more recently still, Erich Reck has used the term “philosophical legend”—“a (quasi-)historical tale that is not examined critically but shapes people’s philosophical outlook”—to name a recurring phenomenon in the history of analytic philosophy (Reck 2013, 7). So the view that illusions of various sorts have shaped the analytic self-image, and thereby the analytic tradition, is perhaps not terribly controversial. What is controversial, however, is my proposal that the “illusion of unity” was essential to the formation of the analytic tradition—that, without it, there would have been no adequate reason to treat those now regarded as analytic philosophers as belonging together in a group, and that therefore the category “analytic philosophy” would not have emerged (at least not as it actually did). Thus, on my view, the analytic tradition owes its very existence to a set of interpretations, which happened to be misinterpretations. It was born neither in a revolt against British Idealism nor in the logical innovations of Frege and Russell but in an episode of misguided collective-intentionality, falsely representing Moore and Russell, and

later Frege, as endorsing a linguistic view of philosophy. The analytic tradition was, in short, interpreted into existence.

Admittedly, this is an odd view, and it should not be presumed that any of the contributors to this volume agree with it. Of course, one can reject my proposal that analytic philosophy was *created* by interpretation and still accept that it has been powerfully *shaped* by interpretation (see Glock, this volume)—as it clearly has been. And this has implications for how analytic philosophy ought to be understood. For instance, Michael Beaney's salutary observation that "the only way to answer the question 'What is analytic philosophy?' is to provide a history of the analytic tradition" (Beaney 2013a, 29) does not go far enough. To fully answer this question requires that we provide a history of the interpretations—including the misinterpretations—that have shaped the analytic tradition.

The present volume makes a beginning (and only a beginning) of this task. Each of the following chapters examines one or more of the main *tradition-shaping interpretations* of analytic philosophy. Some focus on the way an interpretation of a part—a particular text, say—has affected our understanding of the whole. Others focus on the way an interpretation of the whole has influenced interpretations of the parts. Some do both. And a few consider ways in which new interpretations might prove to be tradition-shaping as analytic philosophy moves into the future. In the remainder of this introduction I will survey each of the contributions, noting important connections where possible, and highlighting the significance of the interpretations they explore for our understanding of analytic philosophy.



Two popular beliefs about analytic philosophy are that (i) it originated in a revolt against Idealism and (ii) it originated in a confluence of the work of Moore, Russell and Frege. But the exact nature of this confluence is very much open to interpretation, and different interpretations will have different implications for our understanding of the analytic tradition as a whole. In chapter 2, Peter Hylton observes that Frege was not concerned about Idealism the way Moore and Russell were, and hence that the revolt against Idealism was a purely British phenomenon. What's more, it was a revolt against a distinctive, British form of Idealism rooted in a distinctive, British interpretation of Kant that read him through the lens of Hegel. This interpretation emphasized the ontological and Idealistic dimensions of Kant's thought, internally linking mind and world, knower and known. In Germany, by contrast, Kant had come to be read very differently, first as a naturalistic philosopher, and later as scientific thinker more concerned with epistemology than ontology. For this reason, Frege did not perceive Kantian thought to be the threat that Moore did. Frege's main adversary was not Idealism, but the naturalism and associated psychologism that he saw as threatening the objectivity of knowledge. It was therefore a very particular interpretation of Kant that stimulated Moore to initiate the "revolt against Idealism" which, later, came

to be seen as the birth of analytic philosophy. Consequently, this interpretation of Kant stands as a tradition-shaping interpretation for analytic philosophy. Indeed, most of Hylton's essay is given to showing how some of early analytic philosophy's most characteristic and distinctive views originated as alternatives, not to Kant and Bradley simpliciter, but to Kant and Bradley *as interpreted by Moore*.

An important holistic conclusion follows from Hylton's argument, although he does not draw it explicitly. It is that, to the extent that Frege is counted a father of analytic philosophy, along with Moore and Russell, the idea that analytic philosophy began in a revolt against post-Kantian Idealism is at best a half-truth. Scott Soames (chapter 3) takes this a step further, boldly denying that analytic philosophy originated in a self-conscious revolt against Idealism and instead locating its origins entirely in the logical, linguistic, and mathematical work of Frege and Russell. This he identifies as the first of four major stages of development concerning the role of language in the analytic tradition. The first, dominated by Frege and Russell, was characterized by attempts to create a logically perfect language, driven by the belief that such an "ideal language" would constitute a superior tool for resolving any number of philosophical problems, traditional and contemporary. The second stage saw the young Wittgenstein (of the *Tractatus*) and the logical positivists using "vastly oversimplified models of language ... to sweep away metaphysics, normativity, and much of the traditional agenda of philosophy."⁵ In the third stage, these oversimplifications were unmasked in different ways by ordinary language philosophers on the one hand and Quine on the other. However, their views about language were also too simplistic: Quine's scientistic metaphilosophy foundered with his unsuccessful bid to eliminate intensionality and intentionality, while the ordinary language philosophers' attempt to treat meaning solely in terms of use simply ignored other significant factors affecting meaning. Despite their differences, the first three stages were united in the view that linguistic analysis was central to philosophy. The fourth stage is characterized by the rejection of this view and the associated return of a number of traditional philosophical concerns, alongside a continuing interest in the nature of language.

Hylton and Soames accept that Frege is a founding father of analytic philosophy. However, as Hylton acknowledges in a footnote, this is a contentious view. Others, such as Peter Hacker, have argued that this constitutes a mistaken construal of Frege's place in the analytic tradition (Hacker 1986, cf. Preston 2007, 99–100). For Hacker, while Frege was certainly an important influence on analytic philosophy (via Russell), his philosophical interests were simply not broad enough to justify counting him as a founder of the tradition. On this view, Frege belongs to the analytic tradition only because, in Russell's hands, Frege's logical techniques were joined with broader metaphilosophical concerns, with the result that a new approach to *philosophy*—and not merely to logic—emerged.

We need not resolve this debate to learn from it an important lesson about analytic philosophy. For the mere existence of the debate reveals that to adopt a

perspective on the origin of analytic philosophy is already to be working within a tradition-shaping interpretation. From Hylton and Soames, we see how accepting the “founding father” interpretation of Frege can shape one’s impression not only of the analytic tradition itself but also of its relationships to other philosophical traditions. In their case, it is British Idealism. But for Michael Dummett—the first to draw explicit attention to Frege’s tradition-shaping potential—it problematized the traditionally accepted opposition between analytic and Continental philosophy, at least insofar as the phenomenological tradition is part of the latter.

Dummett’s *Origins of Analytical Philosophy* is one of the earliest historical studies of the analytic tradition, and the whole interest of the work depends upon Frege’s potential to problematize the traditional view of analytic philosophy as “Anglo-American.” Accepting the “founding father” view of Frege, Dummett argued that analytic philosophy is better characterized as “Anglo-Austrian” and that the opposition between analytic and Continental philosophy, at least in the form of phenomenology, had been greatly overblown. With a metaphor that has since become quite famous, he argued that the analytic and phenomenological schools “may be compared with the Rhine and the Danube, which rise quite close to one another and for a time pursue roughly parallel courses, only to diverge in utterly different directions and flow into different seas” (1993, 26). Even more strongly, Dummett says that the two schools have “the same roots,” originating “from the work of those who were at one time quite close to one another, ... giving no appearance of founding divergent schools” (1993, ix).

However, this impression may well be due to Dummett’s choice to ignore the contributions of Moore and Russell “to the birth of analytical philosophy” (1993, 1). Presumably in an attempt to counteract what was, at the time, a tendency to ignore Frege’s significance for the Analytic tradition, Dummett focuses fairly exclusively on him, and on the similarities between Frege and Husserl. Dummett’s observations about analytic and Continental philosophy are based on what he observes within this narrow scope. But Jack Reynolds and James Chase (chapter 4) argue that bringing British analysts—especially Russell and Ryle, but also Moore, Stout, and others—into focus yields a rather different picture of the relationship between the analytic and phenomenological traditions. While the early analysts did have a number of concerns or interests in common with Husserl and the emerging phenomenological tradition, they simply did not engage much with Husserl’s work. Thus the distance separating the two traditions at their origins appears greater than Dummett’s talk of “same roots” suggests. Likewise, the ensuing history is not one of steady divergence. Instead, what appears is an ongoing pattern of ambivalence in which sporadic engagement is “prompted by the perception of philosophical and methodological proximity” but ultimately blocked by other divergent commitments, especially concerning naturalism or scientism in analytic philosophy of mind.

The relationship between early analytic and early phenomenological thinkers also receives attention from Consuelo Preti (chapter 5). Preti shows how a set of misinterpretations of G. E. Moore’s work influenced the early analytic self-concept,

and so became tradition-shaping (mis)interpretations. One of these involves the extent to which Moore's rejection of British Idealism counted as "revolutionary" in the context of turn-of-the-20th-century Cambridge. It turns out that the anti-psychologistic distinction between mental acts and their objects, which was central to Moore's early anti-Idealist arguments, came straight from "the 'new psychology' of German and Austrian thinkers including Herbart, Lotze, Brentano, and Twardowski" to whom he was introduced at Cambridge via studies in "the field of 'mental science'." Thus, as Preti points out, the standard view of Moore and Russell's "rebellion against Idealism" distorts both the relationship between analytic philosophy and British philosophy at the turn of the 20th century and that between analytic and Continental philosophy.

But this is only one of the tradition-shaping misinterpretations surrounding G. E. Moore. Another, even more influential interpretation concerns the role of "meanings" in Moore's philosophical method. In the *Library of Living Philosophers* volume dedicated to Moore, Norman Malcolm ties Moore's philosophical legacy to his supposedly having turned philosophy toward the analysis of (ordinary) language:

Moore's great historical role consists in the fact that he has been perhaps the first philosopher to sense that any philosophical statement that violates ordinary language is false, and consistently to defend ordinary language against its philosophical violators.

(Malcolm 1942, 368)

This represents a widespread misunderstanding of Moore among analytic philosophers. Over against this, Preti argues that "an ambiguity with respect to the notion of 'meaning' led to this interpretation," and that "Moore's signature methods never were concerned with language in itself nor with linguistic meaning." As she proceeds to point out, this misunderstanding of Moore had a profound impact on the ensuing development of the analytic self-concept; for this, more than anything else gave rise to (as I would put it) the illusion that unified Soames' first three stages of development—the notion that analytic philosophy was united by its embrace of a linguistic conception of philosophical analysis, and of philosophy itself.

Rosalind Carey (chapter 6) makes similar observations concerning ways in which misunderstandings of Russell have shaped conceptions of analytic philosophy, and how those conceptions have in turn reinforced and perpetuated those same misunderstandings of Russell. Even though analytic philosophy eventually came to reject the linguistic orientation that had characterized (or at least been thought to characterize) it during its earlier phases of development, standard characterizations of analytic philosophy continue to include other features supposedly embodied by its founding fathers. One of these is that analytic philosophy abjures system-building and instead embraces a piecemeal approach to philosophical work. To the contrary, Carey argues, Russell insisted that the piecemeal work of philosophical analysis

can take place only within overarching philosophical theories of the world. Although they are highly uncertain and do not constitute knowledge, they are nonetheless, according to Carey's Russell, the most important products of philosophy, and it is absurd to think that philosophy should, even if it could, proceed without them. Carey gives us a picture of Russell as a more metaphysically oriented philosopher than has been customary throughout much of the analytic era.

With Anat Biletzki (chapter 7) we turn to "the most diversely interpreted" text of "the most heavily interpreted" figure in the analytic tradition, namely Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Biletzki distinguishes between a traditional, "mainstream" trend and a more recent "radical" trend in interpreting the *Tractatus*. The mainstream trend sees the *Tractatus* as presenting a constructive view on how logical form mediates the language-world connection and the implications of this view for the practice of philosophy. By contrast, the radical trend denies that the *Tractatus* contains a constructive theory at all. Rather than asking which approach is the correct one, Biletzki considers the relationship of each trend to analytic philosophy. The mainstream trend, she notes, is intrinsically related to analytic philosophy insofar as it was crucial both to cementing the original self-image of analytic philosophy as a movement focused on logic, language, and metaphilosophy and to establishing the *Tractatus* itself as a foundational text of that movement.⁶ This seems to pose a problem for the radical trend, however: if the mainstream trend is somehow definitive of analytic philosophy, how can one reject it and still remain within the analytic tradition? The solution, Biletzki proposes, is to recognize that analytic philosophy cannot be defined once and for all. Analytic philosophy is an evolving tradition, with the result that features that characterized it in one era cannot be assumed to do so in another. Specifically, analytic philosophy is no longer so focused on language, logic, and metaphilosophy as it once was; thus, it is no longer plausible to see this triple-focus as definitive of analytic philosophy. (I would add that, given the way it has evolved, it is no longer possible to point to any philosophically interesting feature of analytic philosophy, past or present, capable of defining the whole tradition.) Consequently, Biletzki argues, the radical trend's refusal to see these themes as the foci of the *Tractatus* does not disqualify it, or the *Tractatus* radically interpreted, from belonging to the analytic tradition. To the contrary, the radical trend is simply a manifestation of Wittgenstein interpretation having co-evolved with our understanding of analytic philosophy as a whole—both have gone "from positive content to doubtful self-retrospection."

Like Biletzki, Duncan Richter (chapter 8) explores the complex relationship of Wittgenstein to our evolving interpretations of analytic philosophy itself, but here it is the later Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* that is in view. The later Wittgenstein was largely responsible for effecting a large-scale re-interpretation of analytic philosophy by turning the analytic tradition away from its preoccupation with ideal, logical languages and toward ordinary language as a resource for

dealing with philosophical problems. He was thus massively influential in shaping the analytic tradition from the mid-1940s through the mid-1970s. But his influence on the tradition has been waning ever since. Richter explores a number of possible reasons for this decline. Foremost among these is the decline of linguistic philosophy itself, which is related to yet another set of shifts in the analytic community's self-interpretation (Soames' fourth stage). However, unlike most ordinary language philosophers, some aspects of Wittgenstein's later philosophy have proven to be of continuing interest to post-linguistic analytic philosophers. Foremost among these are Wittgenstein's private-language argument and associated elements of his later perspective on language (such as the notion of linguistic rules and rule-following) and his idea that "meaning is use." Figures as diverse as Kripke, Dennet, and Rorty have found interest and inspiration in these notions. Through them the later Wittgenstein has continued both to affect research programs within contemporary analytic philosophy (such as, via Dennet, the philosophy of mind) and also, as in the case of Rorty, to challenge prevailing notions about the nature and boundaries of analytic philosophy itself.

When I say that Rorty's appropriation of Wittgenstein challenged prevailing notions about analytic philosophy itself, I of course have in mind the fact that Rorty came to combine various Wittgensteinian perspectives with some elements of (especially Dewey's) pragmatism, thus dubbing himself a Wittgensteinian pragmatist. Hence, Rorty threatens to blur the lines between analytic philosophy and pragmatism. But he is not the only figure to do so.⁷ C. I. Lewis, Quine, and Hilary Putnam do so as well, as does a figure long neglected in the history of analytic philosophy: namely, Frank Ramsey. Cheryl Misak (chapter 9) argues that Ramsey deserves a more prominent place in the history of analytic philosophy—a place he almost certainly would have had if he hadn't died prematurely, at the age of 26. Until quite recently, when Ramsey has been remembered at all, it has usually been as a translator of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and as someone who influenced Wittgenstein (in some unspecified way) during his post-*Tractatus* hiatus from philosophy. Misak argues that this standard view seriously underestimates Ramsey's contribution to the development of the Russellian program of logical analysis, his influence on Wittgenstein in moving away from that program, and, through the later Wittgenstein, his influence on the analytic tradition. Misak shows that it was Ramsey, not Wittgenstein, who first became dissatisfied with the sort of logical analysis practiced by the early Russell and (on one traditional interpretation) promoted in the *Tractatus*. Its fault was that, by supposing thoughts to be abstract propositions whose true forms or meanings were to be elucidated by translating them in accordance with formal, truth-functional rules, logical analysis rendered philosophy irrelevant to human life as it is actually lived. This is a concern that many have about analytic philosophy today (see Preston 2007, ch. 1). Even Soames observes toward the end of his essay that analysts "have used truth conditions to *model* representational contents of sentences," but they "haven't paid enough attention to

the demands that sentences place on their users, they haven't "focus[ed] on agents' use of their language for cognitive and communicative purposes," on how "to individuate thoughts beyond necessary [logical] equivalence". But whereas Soames sees this as the next great frontier for formal semantics, Ramsey had little faith that formal techniques alone would suffice. He therefore took the apparent limits of formalization as a reason to abandon the project of formalizing propositions and to adopt instead a dispositional account of belief according to which "[b]eliefs are individuated by their causes and effects," both psycho-experiential and behavioral. This is the foundation of Ramsey's pragmatism. Upon it he began to build theories of meaning and truth "tied to human assertion and inquiry" and so directly relevant to human life as actually lived. Misak sees a direct line running from Ramsey's pragmatism to the later Wittgenstein's treatment of meaning as use, so that, through Wittgenstein, "Ramsey had a tremendous, if subterranean, effect on the trajectory of philosophy". However, this is not the effect that Ramsey himself would have had if he had survived, for Wittgenstein took Ramsey's ideas in a direction that "neglected the objective side of belief, and neglected the pursuit of the advancement of knowledge." Coming to see Ramsey as a more significant contributor to the analytic tradition, therefore, shows that there are resources in the tradition for finding a middle way between the sterility that arises from formal approaches too far removed from human life, and that which arises from informal approaches too deeply enmeshed in *particular forms* of human life.

The concern that analytic philosophy is too far removed from ordinary human life to have any practical human value has been widely shared (see Preston 2007, ch. 1). It has at least two sources which, while distinct, are nonetheless frequently found combined in the history of analytic philosophy. One is the analytic penchant for employing formal methods, as emphasized by Ramsey. The other is the strong tendency in analytic philosophy toward a scientific naturalism whose deflationary tendencies appear hostile to human life.⁸ A number of essays in this volume touch upon these themes. First among them is Alan Richardson's (chapter 10). The advent of the analytic tradition antedates the term "analytic philosophy" by about three decades, and during that period many of the figures and factions within the emerging analytic tradition seemed to fit as well if not better into the more longstanding tradition of "scientific philosophy" (e.g. Russell and the early Wittgenstein—at least on one interpretation—and of course the logical positivists). Why, then, did the analytic tradition come to be regarded as a distinct tradition called "analytic philosophy," rather than as a continuation of the scientific tradition in philosophy? Why, more pointedly, did figures and factions that fit naturally into the latter category come to be seen primarily as "analytic" rather than "scientific" philosophers?

Richardson addresses these matters via a study of logical positivism and its very different receptions in Britain and America. Preceding the advent of the category "analytic philosophy" by about a decade, Richardson observes that the positivists

aspired to be scientific, not analytic. Correspondingly, they called what they did (or aspired to) “scientific philosophy,” not “analytic philosophy.” However, by around 1950, the term “scientific philosophy” had been dropped, even among the logical positivists, and “analytic philosophy” was the term of choice. With this linguistic shift, logical positivism had been subsumed into a broader “analytic” tradition. Why the change? On Richardson’s account, there are at least three parts to the answer. First, a certain group of British philosophers (including Stebbing, Wisdom, Black, Ryle, and Malcolm) so vigorously promoted a Moorean “commonsense” conception of analysis that they prevented identification of the emerging analytic tradition with “scientific philosophy”—even though the Russellian strand of analytic philosophy in Britain, and amongst many American analysts, would have been friendly to such a development. Second, despite this radical difference of purpose, the migration of German and British philosophers to the United States in the wake of WWII generated “a felt need to find some commonality of project,” and this, of course, required the same sort of “broad tent” understanding of the emerging analytic tradition that the Moorean analysts in Britain insisted upon. And, third, both the Carnapian principle of tolerance and Quine’s arguments in “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (on a particular reading, at least) pointed in the direction of this same, ecumenical, broad-tent conception of “analytic philosophy.”

In an essay that beautifully complement’s Richardson’s, Christopher Pincock (chapter 11) examines Ernest Nagel’s turn to logical empiricism in order to illustrate how “prior support for naturalism” among some American philosophers “helped logical empiricist commitments to find a foothold in the United States.” Nagel had embraced naturalism under the influence of Dewey, but he became dissatisfied with naturalistic accounts of the basis of logic until he encountered logical empiricism, and specifically the notion “that we should set up our logic and mathematics so that it provides the best sort of assistance to the primary scientific task of predicting and controlling observable events.” This enabled Nagel to free logic from metaphysical presuppositions, and thus achieve (in his own mind, at least) a consistent naturalism.

Pincock proposes that Nagel’s case is illustrative of a broader trend among American philosophers who came to identify, and to be identified, as analysts: in many cases, they aligned themselves with the analytic tradition because they saw in it the best hope for a consistent naturalism. Richardson confirms Pincock on this point, when he observes that

as the logical positivists began to move to the USA, a number of American philosophers at the time clearly understood that scientific philosophy in this sense was what was on offer. Moreover, these American philosophers found the connection between the projects of logical positivism and their own projects in exactly that ambition.

(Richardson, this volume)

This, Pincock proposes, has implications for our holistic understanding of analytic philosophy: "If we can see how naturalistic commitments served to shape the self-image of analytic philosophers, then we will have a better understanding of what this movement [i.e. the analytic movement] in philosophy might amount to." Because analytic philosophy was for Nagel an extension of his prior commitment to naturalism, he came to see it as continuous with the broader naturalistic tradition in philosophy. At the same time, Pincock emphasizes that Nagel's naturalism was non-reductive, non-eliminative, and pluralistic (willing to take seriously the idea of scientifically approachable phenomena in many domains at many levels of granularity, from the physical and chemical to the psychological and social). Such a naturalism is less prone to the sorts of worries, expressed above, about deflation, but it is unusual in the broad sweep of the history of analytic philosophy. Pincock hopes that Nagel's example will illuminate not only what being an analytic philosopher meant for some in the mid-century American context but also heretofore under-explored possibilities for naturalism within the analytic tradition.

One of the most powerful deflationary tendencies in the early and middle periods of the analytic tradition was that toward behaviorism in the philosophy of mind. In fact, the traditional view is that behaviorism (of various sorts) found both sympathizers and adherents from across every major division of analytic philosophy through the 1960s, from Russell to the logical positivists to Ryle and the later Wittgenstein, to Quine. Misak observes that Ramsey rejected behaviorism in the strongest terms. His, it may seem, was a lone voice. But perhaps not. In our third essay focusing on themes related to deflationary scientific naturalism, Michael Kremer (chapter 12) aims to challenge the mainstream interpretation of Ryle as a behaviorist and materialist. Kremer makes a strong case for the proposal that, between the first and final drafts of *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle's views underwent an evolution away from simple behaviorism and toward what has been called a "person-centered theory of mind." This view rejects the traditional opposition between mind and matter, instead seeing "them" as fused together in the acts and features of persons. For instance, "thinking aloud" on this view really is thinking, despite it also being a physical act of speech. From this perspective, materialistic behaviorism is just as much an error as is Cartesianism—just as there is no "ghost in the machine," there is no machine without its ghost. Along the way, Kremer shows how Ryle was first drawn to behaviorism by his erstwhile student A. J. Ayer, who in turn was strongly influenced by Ryle's thinking as the latter was moving toward the views eventually expressed in *The Concept of Mind*. But, because Ayer began to publish these views first, Ryle was able to learn from Ayer's critics and outmaneuver them in his own work. This took the form of his moving beyond behaviorism to the person-centered view. Thus, as with Nagel, we have in Ryle an alternative, within the analytic tradition, to the deflationary tendencies that have otherwise been dominant.

Continuing the engagement with scientific naturalism in the analytic tradition, Sean Morris (chapter 13) argues that Quine is best understood as part of, and indeed the culmination of, the broader tradition of scientific philosophy. To assimilate Quine to contemporary analytic philosophy is to distort his real views and aims (much as Carey claimed for Russell). To see him merely as the great vanquisher of logical positivism conceals the fact that he and the positivists were co-laborers in the quest to attain a truly scientific philosophy, and that, in exposing the “dogmas of empiricism,” his aim was not to open the door to metaphysics but to eradicate the last remaining vestiges of metaphysics from the tradition of scientific philosophy as it had developed in the analytic context. The scientific tradition with which Morris aligns Quine is the same tradition within which Richardson locates early logical positivism, and within which Nagel’s naturalism falls. According to Morris, the heart of this tradition is the “critical attitude towards metaphysics” that they and Quine espoused. Much of Morris’s essay is taken up with showing how, like Nagel but with a broader scope, Quine attempted to eliminate hidden metaphysical commitments in the views of his forebears and teachers—specifically Russell, C. I. Lewis, and Carnap. Ultimately, however, Quine came to realize that metaphysics cannot be entirely eliminated and the best one can do is to make the ineliminable remainder continuous with science. Surprisingly, this is what makes Quine the *greatest* scientific philosopher in Morris’s view; for, now, as continuous with science, what remains of metaphysics is simultaneously philosophical and scientific. In this way metaphysical notions can be made accountable to our best scientific theories, but without turning those theories themselves into bits of metaphysical dogma. What’s more, philosophy is able to make incremental progress along with the sciences. In light of these advantages, Morris sees it as unfortunate that contemporary analytic philosophers have returned to a more autonomous concept of metaphysics. But Quine’s perspective shows the way forward if ever the analytic tradition is ready to embrace it.

Hans-Johann Glock (chapter 14) charts the next step toward analytic philosophy’s *rapprochement* with metaphysics by explaining Peter Strawson’s approach to linguistic philosophy—his interpretation, if you will, of the linguistic metaphilosophy of mid-20th-century analytic philosophy. Glock locates Strawson in the context of two important tradition-shaping interpretations of analytic philosophy: the idea of analytic philosophy’s linguistic turn and the distinction between ideal- and ordinary-language philosophy. Carefully maneuvering around some interpretive pitfalls regarding these notions, Glock traces the development of Strawson’s thought, showing how his early work in what we would now call the philosophy of language (articulated in the course of a sustained critique of ideal language philosophy) led him to a broader understanding of linguistic philosophy than was usual even among ordinary language philosophers and how this enabled him to enact “the first explicit and elaborate rehabilitation of metaphysics” in the analytic tradition. Along the way, Glock addresses some popular misunderstandings of

Strawson—"misinterpretations [that] have become part of the folklore of analytic philosophy"—and he works through some interpretive puzzles that have heretofore received little notice. Toward the end, Glock raises the theme of naturalism. Unlike proponents of "scientific philosophy," Strawson did not see metaphysics as inconsistent with naturalism, which he embraced. His naturalism, unlike Quine's but like Nagel's, is non-reductive: it "does not differ from the non-reductive analysis that always propelled his descriptive metaphysics." So here, along with Nagel and Ryle, we find precedent within the tradition for a less deflationary form of naturalism.

With Kelly Dean Jolley's essay on J. L. Austin (chapter 15), we find an indictment of the metaphysical and epistemological theorizing in which analysts have indulged—all along, really, but increasingly since the 1960s and 1970s. Like Morris with Quine, Jolley sees in Austin a missed opportunity for the analytic tradition, and one missed precisely because the tradition has tended to misinterpret him. Focusing on Austin's critique of sense-data theory, Jolley explains that Austin is too often taken to be refuting sense-data theory and hence, by default, to be endorsing some version of direct realism. Instead, Austin regards both theories as incoherent. Somewhat after the fashion of the logical positivists, they are not false, but, in a special sense, meaningless—not, of course, because they violate the principle of verification, but because they violate the norms of ordinary language. Kelly presents Austin as standing "athwart the tradition" of analytic epistemology from the beginnings to the present. For in attending carefully to ordinary language, Austin finds, as Moore did at the turn of the twentieth century, that "there is ... no question of how we are to 'get outside the circle of our own ideas and sensations.' Merely to have a sensation is already to be outside that circle" (Moore 1903, 450). But Moore lost his grip on this position when he was seduced into constructing an ontology of cognition that would explain how we make cognitive contact with external objects, and thus began the saga of analytic epistemology. Moore's failure to devise an adequate direct-realist ontology of cognition led him to indirect realism in the form of sense-data theory, and failure there led him to drop the ontology of cognition in favor of criteriology (explaining what makes a belief justified instead of how a perception can be veridical) (cf. Preston 2006). This in turn became the major preoccupation of post-linguistic analytic epistemology. But according to Jolley's Austin, this is all a mistake grounded in the refusal to simply accept what ordinary language analysis reveals to be true.

With Lee Braver (chapter 16), we turn to Donald Davidson's impact on the analytic self-understanding. Braver explains how Davidson's notion of "radical interpretation" emerged as an alternative to Quine's notions of "radical translation" and "ontological relativity." Quine believes that language allows us to operate with different conceptual frameworks, so that to understand another is to "radically translate" from the speaker's framework to one's own. But Davidson argues that intelligibility requires a shared conceptual framework, so that to understand another we must "radically interpret" their utterances within our own conceptual

framework. That is, we must, if we are to judge others rational, and their statements intelligible, assume that they share, at some fundamental level at least, the conceptual framework that we ourselves accept. Perceptively, Braver sees the dynamic of Davidsonian radical interpretation at work in the relations between analysts and Continentals. From Frege's reading of Husserl to the infamous Searle-Derrida exchange, analysts have tended to regard Continental philosophers as irrational (or worse!) because they seemed not to share the analysts' conceptual scheme. This refusal to interpret Continental thinkers charitably has powerfully shaped the analytic tradition throughout its history.

It is fitting that, in our penultimate chapter, we turn to one of the first historians of analytic philosophy: namely, Michael Dummett. As noted earlier in this introduction, through his historical work, Dummett's advanced an unorthodox interpretation of not only the analytic tradition but also the nature of analytic philosophy, one that analysts and historians have been grappling with ever since. Although most contemporary historians of analytic philosophy would reject Dummett's views, they nonetheless owe him a great debt for helping to open space for historical work in a professional and intellectual context dominated by analytic philosophy's (then) characteristic ahistorical, or even anti-historical, attitude. Anat Matar (chapter 17) explains what, in Dummett's own thought, enabled him to break free of this ahistorical attitude and hence help inaugurate what has been called "the historical turn" in analytic philosophy (cf. Reck 2013). Matar astutely observes that the ahistoricism characteristic of analytic philosophy was never a matter of merely ignoring historical texts and figures but "was manifested rather in a total denial of a dialectical approach towards metaphysics." She traces this denial to an atemporal conception of dialectic-as-analysis which the early analysts inherited from Kant. Dummett, by contrast, was convinced that temporality is an ineliminable dimension of all human endeavor. This, according to Matar, is one of several Hegelian features in Dummett's thought which explain not only his interest in the history of analytic philosophy but also his particular approach to historical interpretation (which some have criticized as yielding an anachronistic portrait of Frege) and his endorsement of anti-realism.

If Matar is right, then it seems that the analytic tradition has, in a way, come full circle; the Hegelianism in whose rejection analytic philosophy (partly) originated has now come to shape the analytic tradition by facilitating "the historical turn." What's more, insofar as Dummett is largely responsible for reminding the analytic philosophers of his era about Frege's significance for the tradition, the covert return of Hegelianism in his work is largely responsible for generating the debate about the origin(s) of analytic philosophy, discussed earlier in connection with the essays by Hylton, Soames, and Reynolds and Chase. So Dummett's Hegelianism shaped the analytic tradition in at least two major ways: by facilitating the historical turn and by proffering a novel and influential tradition-shaping interpretation from within that turn.

Rather in the fashion of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, our book concludes with a surprising twist. In her essay Sandra Lapointe (chapter 18) calls into question an interpretation of analytic philosophy that is pervasively assumed in contemporary thought and talk about it, and one central to the project of this very volume: namely, "that analytical philosophy *is itself one*—unique and distinctive—tradition." In the course of an extremely rich discussion of methodological issues faced by historians of philosophy, Lapointe rejects this interpretation, which she dubs "the traditionalist conjecture." Instead, she argues, analytic philosophy should be understood as the concurrence of "*many* traditions, schools and movements," and we should resist any temptation to see them as forming the sort of unified whole apt to be the topic of a single narrative.

This is an intriguing suggestion and one which, in its way, serves as a mirror image to my proposal that analytic philosophy was interpreted into existence. For what Lapointe seems to be proposing is that analytic philosophy, as an identifiable *this*, a historically unified and bounded whole, can and should be interpreted out of existence. And once that is done, Lapointe observes, the doors would be thrown open to a host of reinterpretations of analytic philosophy's development on many levels of granularity. Indeed, just what we mean by "analytic philosophy" would then be radically open to interpretation. But then, maybe it always has been.

Notes

- 1 Schlick (loc. cit) clearly thought there were limits to reinterpretation within a tradition: departing too far from the original understanding of the fundamental principles meant that a new movement had arisen.
- 2 In his excellent book, *What is Analytic Philosophy?*, Hans-Johann Glock notes the scant attention paid by philosophers to the terms "school", "movement" and "tradition," and particularly to the sometimes subtle differences among them (Glock 2008, 220ff; 2013, 335ff). Glock and I agree that "it makes sense to distinguish between a closely knit philosophical school and looser groupings such as movements or traditions" (Glock 2008, 151–2), but we disagree over the role of views (doctrines, theories, ideas, etc.) in binding such groups together. I have maintained (Preston 2007, 59–67; 2011, 55ff) that philosophical schools are fundamentally *schools of thought* and therefore that particular views, or ways of thinking about a topic, are essential to them. This is not to say that they are *merely* schools of thought, but only that some degree of fundamental, ideational unanimity is required for being a *philosophical* school or movement or tradition. We tend to call a school of thought a "movement" when, gaining adherents and gaining in popularity, it creates a noticeable change to the intellectual landscape of some socio-historical setting. The term "movement" is apt here because it indicates a sort of intellectual *migration* toward a certain school of thought. It is a particularly tempting term in cases where the change in question is (in part) a result of the efforts of adherents to create more adherents. In such cases, a philosophical "movement," may be described as an embodied school of thought with a social agenda, a school on a mission to change an existing intellectual status quo.
- 3 I have covered this matter in some detail elsewhere (Preston 2007, sections 2.3 and 3.4). Michael Beaney has challenged my view that analytic philosophy was traditionally understood to be an ideationally unified school on the grounds that Max Black, in 1938 and again in 1950, explicitly denied that it was (Beaney, 2013b, 45n). However, the

issue is not whether analytic philosophy was *universally* regarded as an ideationally unified school. The issue, rather, is what was emerging, and eventually emerged, as the norm in thinking and speaking about analytic philosophy. I myself mention Nagel's reluctance in 1936 to describe analytic philosophy as an ideationally unified school (Preston 2007, 74), but I do not take this to defeat my claims about the traditional conception of analytic philosophy. Despite dissenters like Nagel and Black, the overall pattern of usage associated with the term "analytic philosophy" from the 1930s through the early 1970s seems to me to show that the norm was to think and speak of analytic philosophy in accordance with the traditional conception as I have presented it here.

- 4 See Preston 2007, Glock 2008, Hacker 1998, 4–14, Monk 1997, Hylton 1998, Beaney 2003, and also Preti's and Carey's contributions to this volume.
- 5 I find it obnoxiously pedantic, in a passage clearly devoted to discussing a particular essay in this volume, to cite quotations from that essay as "(so-and-so, this volume)." Thus, in the part of this introduction clearly devoted to surveying (e.g.) Soames' contribution to this volume, the reader may safely assume that any unattributed quotation is from the very essay under discussion. And so on, *mutatis mutandis*, for the sections discussing the other contributions.
- 6 Indeed, the mainstream trend in *Tractatus* interpretation was not merely tradition-shaping but, in an important sense, tradition-constituting. It is in fact the only early analytic text to clearly take a "linguistic turn," and the idea that analytic philosophy was born in the linguistic turn depends in large part on reading the position of the *Tractatus* backwards into Russell, Moore, and Frege. Of course, the most famous example of a mainstream interpretation—that of the logical positivists—is now widely regarded to be mistaken, and badly so. But, Biletzki argues, this does not disqualify it from belonging to analytic philosophy. Despite its being mistaken, it was powerfully tradition-shaping, so it belongs to analytic philosophy not because it conformed to the tradition but because it made the tradition conform to it.
- 7 Gregory Frost-Arnold (forthcoming) argues that the lines were blurred from early on, as Ernest Nagel in 1936, and Feigl and Sellars in 1949, clearly thought of Peirce as similar enough to canonical analysts to be included in their ranks but "did not focus on Peirce for purely accidental reasons" (Frost-Arnold, forthcoming).
- 8 Tyler Burge addressed this worry in memorable fashion in his 1999 presidential address to the Western Division of the American Philosophical Association (Burge 1999). The bulk of 20th-century philosophy, Burge claims, busied itself with deflating humanity, and, along with it, philosophy. To demonstrate what he is getting at, Burge presents a fictional dialogue between a philosophy professor—Professor Carwittup, who is clearly the embodiment of 20th-century analytic philosophy—and a prospective philosophy student. In the course of this dialogue, Professor Carwittup manages to dismiss as antiquated or unscientific every topic in which the prospective student suggests he might be interested: the search for the meaning of life, the quest for truth, the attempt to discover a rational basis for moral evaluation, or to come to an understanding of free will, consciousness, or personal identity—all are written off as the pipe-dreams of a now defunct discipline, viz., traditional philosophy.

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2

IDEALISM AND THE ORIGINS OF ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

Moore Interprets Kant and Bradley

Peter Hylton

In this essay, I am concerned with the role that Idealism plays in the origins of analytic philosophy. (Here, and throughout the essay, I use “Idealism” to mean Kantian and post-Kantian Idealism, not Berkeleyan Idealism.) I argue that the place to look for this influence is not, as one might perhaps expect, Germany; it is, rather, Britain. In particular, the interpretation of Idealism by G. E. Moore (and, following him, Bertrand Russell) is crucial for the early stages of analytic philosophy.

Analytic philosophy is widely, and with good reason, thought of as having two points of origin.¹ First, in the work of Gottlob Frege: with his systematic presentation of modern logic, his use of that logic to give an account of arithmetic, and his articulation of the philosophical views he takes to be required by his logic. Second, in the work of Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore at the very end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Russell and Moore put forward a metaphysical view incorporating a strong form of realism, and developed their philosophical views on that basis. Russell formulated modern logic and used it to account for mathematics. In both of these matters his view resembles Frege’s, but was initially worked out independently; he subsequently sought to apply the same principles to an understanding of empirical knowledge. Moore put forward a strongly realist view of ethics and developed a highly influential conception of philosophical analysis.

So the question of the influence of Idealism on the origins of analytic philosophy has two different answers, depending on which point of origin we consider. In Britain, Idealism had a direct and decisive influence on G. E. Moore and on Bertrand Russell, whose work inaugurated analytic philosophy in Britain. In Germany, by contrast, Idealism had no direct influence on Frege, or on the earliest stages of analytic philosophy. Both Frege, on the one hand, and Moore and

Russell, on the other hand, engaged with the work of Kant. But they interpreted that work in quite different ways. In the context of late-19th-century Britain, it is natural to think of Kant primarily as an Idealist, or at least as the precursor of Idealism. Nothing of the sort holds for late-19th-century Germany, where quite different aspects of Kant's work were emphasized.

I shall enlarge on these points in the first section. The second section, which forms the rest of the essay, will discuss the very negative interpretation of Idealism put forward by Moore in 1898 and will be divided into two sub-sections, one discussing his interpretation of Kant, the other his interpretation of Bradley.

Idealism in Britain and in Germany

In Britain, Idealism did not become widely known and influential until the last third of the 19th century.² In the hands of such figures as T. H. Green, F. H. Bradley, and Edward Caird, it gradually became the dominant view, as it was in the 1890s, when Russell and Moore received their early philosophical education; it remained significant into the 1920s.

The dominance of Idealism in late-19th-century Britain affected the way that Kant's work was understood. The British Idealists, for the most part, read Kant as a precursor of their own more Hegelian form of Idealism. T. H. Green, for example, rejects the Kantian distinction between sensibility and the understanding, and he also rejects the idea of things in themselves; nevertheless, he does not repudiate Kant. Rather, he interprets him as holding correct views but failing to think them through to their conclusion, because of the continuing influence of earlier philosophy. If Kant had followed his principles to their conclusion, on this account, he would have been led to a broadly Hegelian form of Idealism. Green speaks of "the incomplete development of [Kant's] idealism which is shown by his partial retention ... of that antithesis between the world of experience and the world of ideas which he inherited from Leibniz" (Green 1894, v. iii, 137). Similar views of Kant, as above all the precursor of a broadly Hegelian form of Idealism, are widely expressed in late-19th and early-20th-century British philosophy.³

In the context of late-19th-century British philosophy, it is thus natural to think of Kant as himself an Idealist. Certainly Russell and Moore did so. Their reaction against Idealism was a reaction against a nexus of views broad enough to include Hegel, Lotze, the British Idealists such as Caird, Green, and Bradley—and Kant (as read by the Idealists).

In Germany, by contrast, the influence of Idealism declined after Hegel's death in 1831 (see Köhnke 1991). The increasing prominence of empirical science (including psychology), and the use of historical-critical methods in the study of religion, encouraged naturalistic and materialistic views. In some cases, such views looked upon logic and science as no more than natural (psychological) phenomena, to be investigated in the same general way as any other phenomena.

Out of these views, and in conscious reaction to post-Kantian Idealism, a ‘back to Kant’ movement arose. In the initial phase of this movement Kant was himself interpreted in a naturalistic fashion: forms of sensibility were taken to be subject to psychological or physiological investigation. Later phases of the movement, including the views grouped together under the rubric “Neo-Kantianism,” rejected this kind of naturalism and insisted on an *a priori* element in knowledge. The focus here was not on metaphysics but rather on epistemology—and, in particular, on understanding mathematics and the natural sciences (see Friedman 2000).

The advocates of the “back to Kant” movement, and the neo-Kantians, generally interpret Kant quite differently from the way in which he was generally interpreted in late-19th-century Britain. The Kant of the neo-Kantians is not naturally thought of as primarily a precursor of later Idealism, i.e. as holding views that reach their natural fruition in the work of Hegel and his successors. The neo-Kantians tend to emphasize Kant’s concern with epistemology, and, in particular, with mathematics and with natural science; this leads to a view of his work which is quite different to that emphasized by the British Idealists. In the context of late-19th-century Britain it is appropriate to think of Kant as a proto-Idealist; in the context of mid- and late-19th-century Germany, however, Kant appears more as a scientific philosopher.⁴

These points about the interpretation of Kant in late-19th-century Germany make a difference to how we should think about Frege. Frege is not concerned at all with post-Kantian Idealism.⁵ He was, to some extent, influenced by Kant, but two points should be noted about this. First, the Kant who influenced Frege was the scientific Kant, rather than the proto-Idealist Kant. Second, while Frege argues against specific claims of Kant’s, he does not reject the Kantian picture (as he understood it) wholesale. He disagreed with Kant about the status of arithmetic but, unlike Russell and many subsequent analytic philosophers, he did not take this as the basis of a more general anti-Kantian argument.⁶ To the contrary: Frege accepts a number of distinctively Kantian doctrines⁷ and always speaks of Kant with great respect.

What Frege is most concerned to oppose is the naturalism that became prevalent in mid-19th-century Germany, especially in its psychologistic version. He argues vehemently against the view that the way to understand arithmetic and logic is in psychological terms, by attending to events in the mind of the person performing arithmetical calculations or logical inferences; he argues that naturalism undermines the claims of truth and objectivity entirely, and he takes this as a *reductio ad absurdum*. But this is a very long way from his being in any way concerned with the quite different views of the Idealists.

Moore Interprets Idealism

The upshot of the previous section is that the influence of Idealism on the origins of analytic philosophy is not to be found by looking at the development of

Frege's thought. It is, rather, to be found in the development of the thought of Moore and Russell. Here is it Moore who plays the crucial role. Russell very rapidly accepted his negative interpretation of Idealism, as well as the chief doctrines which Moore worked out in opposition to that movement. It is to those doctrines that Russell refers in the Preface to the *Principles of Mathematics* when he says: "On fundamental questions of philosophy, my position, in all its chief features, is derived from Mr. G. E. Moore" (1903, vxiii).

Moore's opposition to Idealism can be dated very precisely. He was an undergraduate at Trinity College, Cambridge, graduating in 1896. In the autumn of 1897 he submitted a dissertation to Trinity College in support of his application for a Prize Fellowship; in that dissertation there is no sign of opposition to Idealism. His application, however, was unsuccessful; a year later he submitted a new dissertation, incorporating most of the previous year's attempt but excluding some of it and containing a considerable amount of new material. In the new material in the 1898 dissertation, he makes a clear break with Idealism and puts forward doctrines which are strongly opposed to Idealist views.⁸ The new view co-exists uneasily with some Idealist doctrines which Moore continues to hold for a few years longer, but the decisive step away from Idealism is taken in this work.

The arguments against Idealism occur in the first two chapters of the 1898 dissertation. The first is directed against Kant, in particular against his Transcendental Idealism; the second against Bradley, in particular against his view of judgment. Kant's views and Bradley's may both be thought of as forms of Idealism; they are, however, markedly different. In the 1897 dissertation these differences were important to Moore. In the Preface he says that his sympathy with Kant (in particular, with Kant as interpreted by Caird) is limited "by my far greater agreement with Mr. F. H. Bradley's general philosophical attitude" (3f.). In the 1898 dissertation, however, the differences among various forms of Idealism play very little role; Moore opposes all forms of Idealism.

Moore on Kant

Moore's criticism of Kant is directed against Transcendental Idealism, the view that the world as we know it is the result of our imposing the forms of sensibility and the categories of the understanding on given raw material that is not itself knowable. According to that view, certain fundamental features of the world result from this imposition and thus hold necessarily (at least of the world insofar as it is knowable by us). Examples include the facts that the world is in space and time, and that objects in it are subject to causal laws.

Moore criticizes Kant's arguments for Transcendental Idealism, particularly the argument in the Transcendental Analytic, which is concerned with the categories of the understanding. Moore depicts Kant as arguing for the necessity of the categories as follows:

All knowledge ... would be impossible, unless the presentations, given through sense, could be united in consciousness It is ... because any empirical proposition must stand in some relation to the unity of thought, that the conceptions of the understanding ... are involved in it.

(146f.)

Moore raises some objections to this, but accepts “that some categories are involved in every judgment” (147) and thus in all knowledge. He holds, however, that this Kantian claim is simply irrelevant. Our concern, in his view, should not be with the nature and presuppositions of knowledge or of judgment, but simply with the way things are:

Are we concerned here at all with knowledge? Will it not be sufficient for our purposes, if we can find out what is true? ... If truth is something independent of knowledge and therefore of consciousness, no theory which tries to explain the validity of necessary propositions by shewing them to be involved in knowledge or consciousness can possibly attain its purpose.

(147f.)

Moore accepts that the truth of certain propositions may be “involved in ... consciousness”. He denies, however, that this would show that those propositions are in fact true, much less that they are necessarily true: their being “involved in consciousness” may be just a matter of our psychology.

For the Kantian, the applicability of the categories is not a matter of *empirical* psychology, of ordinary psychological events that takes place within the knowable world. It is, rather, a condition of there being such a world at all, and hence a matter of *Transcendental* psychology. Later Idealists had nevertheless criticized Kant for relying on psychology. Hegel, for example, says, “Kant remained restricted and confined by his psychological point of view and his empirical methods” (1955, v. iii, 431; cf. also 432f.). Moore presses such criticisms further, saying: “It has been very generally agreed that some of Kant’s work is vitiated by being merely psychological; and I am unable to see that the doctrines of the unity of apperception and of the transcendental ideality of space and time are any better than psychology” (150). Moore realizes that Kant’s view “distinguishes ‘mind’ in the transcendental sense from mind as determined in time” (156) and thus as an object of empirical knowledge. But Moore denies that there is a good reason for this distinction: “There is, in short, no reason for supposing that such a science as ‘Transcendental Psychology’ in distinction from empirical psychology does exist; or for regarding ‘Reason’ as other than an object of empirical psychology” (156).

Moore anticipates the Kantian response to this: “It is attempted to base the distinction [between empirical psychology and ‘Transcendental Psychology’] by asserting that Transcendental Reason is a condition for the possibility of knowledge ...” (156). His answer is a rejection of the central Kantian idea of necessary

conditions of knowledge, and with it the whole idea of the transcendental in Kant's sense. The Kantian idea of a condition of knowledge, he claims, is doubly ambiguous:

By "knowledge" what is meant? If "truth," then it is difficult to see that there can be any other condition for a true proposition than some other true proposition. If empirical cognition, then does not empirical psychology investigate the conditions for the possibility of this? A similar ambiguity is involved in the word 'condition'. In what sense a "condition"? If an existent be meant ... then condition is equivalent to "cause" ... as in empirical psychology. But if a logical condition be meant, then it must be some true proposition, from the truth of which the truth of another can be inferred.

(156)

Moore's view is that a condition on knowledge must be either logical or straightforwardly empirical—presumably psychological or physiological.⁹ On neither understanding do we have a condition on knowledge which is also a condition on what is known. He thus makes a sharp distinction between the act of knowledge and the object which we are attempting to know, with the latter being wholly independent of the former. Moore's insistence on this distinction amounts to a complete rejection of Idealism.¹⁰

The view that Moore attributes to Kant is that our knowledge results from an interaction between our minds on the one hand and something wholly external to them on the other. This view seems to make the "wholly external something" completely unknowable while also making claims about it. It is also liable to the criticism that it makes our knowledge seem inadequate; hence the familiar post-Kantian criticism that Kant's view is a form of skepticism. The characteristic response of later Idealists is not to abandon the idea of presuppositions of knowledge but, rather, to give up on the idea that we can coherently think of anything wholly independent of such presuppositions, i.e. to give up on the Kantian idea of things in themselves.

Moore also rejects the idea of wholly unknowable things in themselves, but in a completely different way. Rather than denying that there are things wholly independent of our minds, he accepts that there are such things but insists that we can know them. This knowledge has no presuppositions or conditions (other than logical conditions on the truth of what is known and empirical conditions on our ability to know it). Moore insists that in knowledge we are directly and immediately related to objects outside our minds, objects which are in no way affected by being known.

Moore's view that we have immediate knowledge of objects outside our minds shows up in his frequent use of perceptual (usually visual) language, referring especially to our perception of simple sensory qualities. His idealist opponents would, of course, not accept that even our knowledge of such qualities is

immediate and presuppositionless, but it is perhaps the kind of knowledge for which this view is most plausible. Thus, in *Principia Ethica* Moore explains his view of our knowledge of the indefinable quality *good* by comparing it with our perception of the indefinable quality *yellow* (10). Similarly, Russell, in the Preface to the *Principles of Mathematics* (published in the same year as *Principia Ethica*), says:

The discussion of indefinables—which forms the chief part of philosophical logic—is the endeavour to see clearly, and to make others see clearly, the entities concerned, in order that the mind may have that kind of acquaintance with them which it has with redness or the taste of a pineapple.

(1903, xv)

The point is the same in Russell as in Moore: our knowledge of simple sensory qualities is assumed to be direct, immediate, and presuppositionless, and our knowledge of other, more abstract, entities—of goodness or of the indefinables of logic and mathematics—is then assimilated to that kind of knowledge. All knowledge, on this view, rests on direct and immediate knowledge.

The fundamental cognitive relation, which Russell later calls “acquaintance,” is a relation between a mind and a known entity. Each of the relata in this relation is independent of the other: in the terms common at the time, and much emphasized in the slightly later work of Moore and Russell, the relation is *external* rather than internal. This position is implicit in the 1898 dissertation: the idea that the mind and the known object are internally related, so that each affects the other, contradicts the sharp distinction between the two which Moore’s opposition to Idealism requires. The point emerges in a passage in which Moore discusses Caird’s defense of Kant. Moore quotes Caird (1889) as saying: “Whatever we deal with, we are still dealing with our own consciousness of things” (see 148f.). Moore claims, to the contrary, that the idea that things are *related* to our consciousness of them implies that they are quite distinct from our consciousness.

Soon after the 1898 dissertation, Moore argued, along similar lines, that all relations are external (see 1903b, 33). In Moore’s slightly later work, and that of Russell, this view develops into an atomistic conception of knowledge and an atomistic metaphysics. Knowledge is atomistic in the sense that the knowledge that I acquire by knowing any one entity—being acquainted with it—is independent of my knowledge of any other entity. And the atomistic metaphysics sees the universe as made up of entities each of which is what it is independent of any other entities. The entities are related, of course, but each of them is unaffected by its relations to other entities. It is in this spirit that Moore takes, as the epigraph of *Principia Ethica*, the saying attributed to Bishop Butler: “Everything is what it is, and not another thing.”

According to this picture, knowledge is fundamentally a matter of acquaintance, and acquaintance is a purely external relation between a mind and the known object. The mind, in being acquainted with an object, does not in any

way affect that object. The knowing mind is thus purely passive and receptive. One might suppose that Russell, as a logician, would emphasize the mental activity of inferring one thing from another, and see that as an activity which leads to knowledge. But not so. He accepts that inference may bring knowledge but denies that it is in the relevant sense an *activity* of the mind: “the mind, in fact, is as purely receptive in inference as common sense supposes it to be in perception of sensible objects” (Russell 1903, 33).¹¹

The view that the mind is passive in knowledge is an important point of affinity between Moore and Russell on the one hand and classical Empiricism on the other. We should not, however, be tempted to think of Moore and Russell as setting out to revive Empiricism. To the contrary; they held that view to have been definitively refuted by the Idealists. Moore, for example, says of “the philosophic school, to which modern Idealists belong” that “[a]gainst Sensationalism and Empiricism they [*sic*] have maintained the true view” (1903a, 7). The crucial point of distinction is that Moore and Russell both hold that abstract objects, such as universals, propositions, and concepts, are among the entities with which we are acquainted.

The main themes to emerge from this discussion are realism, atomism, and the idea that knowledge is fundamentally a matter of direct acquaintance. Since it is implausible to suppose that we are directly acquainted with physical objects, this last point quickly leads Moore to the view that our knowledge of such objects is based on our direct awareness of sense data. Russell, again, follows him. These themes all play an important role in the next phase of development of analytic philosophy, as seen for example in Russell’s Logical Atomism.

Moore Interprets Bradley

The idea that the mind is passive in knowledge might seem to leave us unable to account for the possibility of judgment, or propositional thought about the world. (This was, indeed, a criticism that the Idealists made of Empiricism.) One of the bases of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism is the idea that the mind is active in judgment, and that this activity is subject to certain conditions. Given that idea, the world—or at least the world about which we can make judgments—is presumably subject to the same conditions. Kant claims that the conditions of our judgements are also the conditions of experience or, in Kantian terms, of our being able to synthesize our representations into a unified intuition of an object. Thus he says: “The same function which gives unity to the various representations *in a judgment* also gives unity to the mere synthesis of representations *in an intuition*” (1929, B 104–5; emphasis in the original).

Moore accepts that he needs to give an account of propositions that avoids this kind of way in to Idealism. Chapter II of the 1898 dissertation, which sets out “to expound and support the ultimate philosophical position, which was presupposed in the last chapter” (161), is largely concerned with such an account.

Moore proceeds by way of criticism of Bradley. Bradley had distinguished between ideas as psychological phenomena and ideas as they are used in judgment, i.e. meanings or logical ideas; the latter, he insists, cannot be understood simply as mental states. Moore applauds this anti-psychologism but thinks that Bradley does not stick to it consistently. In particular, he accuses Bradley of taking meanings as abstractions from psychological states; in support of this charge, he quotes Bradley as saying: "A sign is any fact that has a meaning, and meaning consists of a part of the content ... cut off, fixed by the mind, and considered apart from the existence of the sign" (Bradley, 1883, 4; quoted by Moore on 162). Moore interprets this, quite uncharitably, as implying that the "cutting off" must be a conscious and deliberate act.¹² Understood in that way, the view seems to require that I cannot have a logical idea unless I have already made a judgment (in particular, a judgment about the content of the psychological idea from which I am "cutting off" a part to use as a logical idea). But then the account of judgment, or propositional thought quite generally, is simply circular: a judgment requires logical ideas, which in turn require prior judgments (see 163–5).

Moore's response to this supposed circularity is to reject all attempts to explain logical ideas, or concepts as he comes to call them, in other terms. They cannot be explained "in terms of some existent fact, whether mental or of any other nature. All such explanations do in fact presuppose the nature of the concept as a *genus per se*, irreducible to anything else."¹³ Concepts, on this view, are neither physical nor mental, but are unchanging entities of a distinct kind. Propositions are made up of concepts. The thinking mind is in contact with concepts and propositions but neither creates them nor affects them:

A proposition is not composed of words, nor yet of thoughts, but of concepts. Concepts are possible objects of thought; but that is no definition of them. It merely states that they may come into relation with a thinker; and in order they may do anything, they must already be something. It is indifferent to their nature whether anybody thinks them or not. They are incapable of change; and the relation into which they enter with the knowing subject implies no action or reaction

(165)

We stand in an immediate cognitive relation to some concepts and propositions, but this is an external relation: the concepts and propositions are wholly independent of us and our ideas.

Moore also makes a further claim. The concepts which, on his account, make up a given proposition, are not merely *related* to the subject matter of that proposition: they *are* its subject matter. Or, to put the same point the other way around, the ordinary objects of the world, the things we make judgments about, are concepts or complexes of concepts: "All that exists is thus composed of concepts necessarily related to one another in specific manners, and likewise to the

concept of existence" (ibid., 181). What there is in the world is to be understood in terms of concepts and their relations, which are also concepts, and propositions, which are complexes of concepts. If a proposition is true then it does not merely *express* a fact; it *is* a fact. It is a complex made up of concepts, and concepts make up the world. A false proposition is an entity of exactly the same sort, a complex of concepts, i.e. of the entities it is about, except that it happens to be false. Here, truth and falsity are simple and unanalyzable properties of propositions; fact, reality, and existence are explained in terms of them. Thus Moore says that an existent is "nothing but a concept or complex of concepts standing in a unique relation to the concept of existence" (ibid., 183).¹⁴ His view thus makes no distinction between objects of thought and reality, between the entities of which a proposition is composed and the entities which it is about. The view, he says, is "the most Platonic system of modern times."¹⁵

In taking this further step, Moore may have been influenced by a line of thought later made explicit by Russell. Suppose the content of our judgments were made up of entities other than those the judgment is about—"ideas," Russell calls them. In that case, Russell says, "ideas become a veil between us and outside things" (Russell 1911, 155). But then, Russell holds, "we never really, in knowledge, attain to those things we are supposed to be knowing about, but only to the ideas of those things" (ibid.). If our judgments were made up of ideas, we would need to explain how those judgments manage to be about what they are about: What makes a given idea the idea of a certain entity, distinct from the idea? How, in virtue of having the idea, do I succeed in thinking *about* that other entity? The answers are, at least, not obvious. As Russell says: "The relation of mind, idea, and object, on this view, is utterly obscure" (ibid.). Given the emphasis on immediacy in Platonic Atomism, any view in which our contact with the things we talk about is indirect, mediated by ideas or the like, is likely to seem problematic.

The fact that Moore takes this further step makes a crucial difference to his thought as a whole. As Baldwin and Preti put it, "[i]n effect a theory of judgment turns into a metaphysics, thanks to the role of propositions" (Moore 2011, xxxiii). Russell, moreover, follows him.¹⁶ Thus we get the sort of view of meaning that is on display in, for example, the theory of descriptions: the meaning of a term is taken as the entity for which it stands, and understanding the term requires acquaintance with that entity. Once Russell denies that we are acquainted with physical objects, he can no longer apply this view directly to ordinary language. He comes to hold, rather, that almost all our sentences have an underlying structure which is quite different from their surface structure and which may be uncovered by analysis. He speaks of the totality of fully analyzed sentences as constituting the logically perfect language (see Russell 1918, 176). His following out the Moorean conception of a proposition thus commits him to a very extensive program of philosophical analysis.

The Moorean view of propositions, as developed by Russell, is vulnerable to internal difficulties. It requires us to accept false propositions as genuine entities in

the world, a position that Russell came to find implausible. It makes truth and falsehood indefinable and thus, as Russell says, “*seems* to leave our preference for truth a mere unaccountable prejudice, and in no way to answer to the feeling of truth and falsehood” (Russell 1904, 473). The view also gives no account of the unity of a proposition, of the relation which must hold among various entities to unite them into a proposition. For these reasons, Russell abandons Moorean propositions in favor of a view he called “the multiple relation theory of judgment,” according to which there are no propositions independent of us. On this view, the judging mind is not acquainted with a single entity, the proposition; rather, it is acquainted with various entities which it unites into a judgment. This view, however, is subject to further difficulties (in particular: it seems unable to explain why we cannot judge nonsense). These difficulties led Wittgenstein to develop the so-called “Picture Theory” of propositions in the *Tractatus* and also led Russell to a partially behaviourist view of meaning in *The Analysis of Mind*. These attempts to explain propositional thought lead, more distantly, to the continuing concern (amounting at times almost to an obsession) of analytic philosophy with issues of meaning.

Notes

- 1 Thus Hans Sluga says: “Following common practice, I take analytic philosophy as originating in the work of Frege, Russell, Moore, and Wittgenstein” (Sluga 1997, 7n). (I omit Wittgenstein from consideration in subsequent sections because the primary influences on his early thought were Russell and Frege.) Another distinguished commentator focuses exclusively on Russell and Moore: “Twentieth-century analytic philosophy has its twofold roots in Cambridge at the turn of the century in the work of G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell” (Hacker 1996, 5). It seems to me, however, a mistake to omit Frege, and Germany, from the story.
- 2 The origin of Idealism in Britain is sometimes said to be Stirling’s book, *The Secret of Hegel* (Stirling 1865); some earlier idealist influence is to be found in the work of Carlyle and Coleridge but it played no significant role in academic philosophy. See Pucelle 1955 and ch. 3 of Passmore 1957.
- 3 A particularly noteworthy example is Norman Kemp Smith: “all that is most vital in his [Kant’s] teaching, and has proved really fruitful in its after-history, would seem to be in line with the positions which have since been more explicitly developed by such writers as Lotze, Sigwart, Green, Bradley, Bosanquet, James, and Dewey, and which in their tenets all derive from Hegel’s re-statement of Kant’s logical doctrines” (Kemp Smith 1923, 36).
- 4 André Carus speaks of Kant’s “ambivalence with respect to enlightenment and scientific thinking” and of his “two legacies” (2007, 69).
- 5 Here I disagree with Michael Dummett, who describes Frege as “a realist in revolt against the prevailing idealism of his day” (1973, 197). For evidence for what I take to be the correct view, see Sluga 1975 and 1976.
- 6 For Russell’s use of logicism as an argument against Idealism in general, and against Kant in particular, see Hylton 1990a.
- 7 In particular, Frege accepts Kant’s view of geometry: that it is based on intuition and is therefore synthetic *a priori*. See, for example, Frege 1968, §14: “the axioms of geometry are independent ... of the primitive laws of logic, and consequently are synthetic.” (I have modified Austin’s translation slightly.)

- 8 The two dissertations are published, together with a long and very useful introduction by Baldwin and Preti, in Moore 2011. References to this work will be by page number standing alone. There is a complication concerning the text of the 1898 dissertation. The only extant copy of the dissertation is missing a number of pages from the first two chapters. Internal evidence strongly suggests that those pages were extracted in order to be used in Moore 1899. Baldwin and Preti argue persuasively that this was indeed the case, and put forward a reconstruction of the whole dissertation that uses material from the published essay (see §VIII.2 of their introduction). For the purposes of this essay, I simply assume that the editors are correct in every particular. (If they are not, and some of the material that I cite as coming from the 1898 dissertation in fact does not do so, it makes little difference to my argument. The material was written by Moore, and presumably in 1898, since the essay was published in April of the following year.)
- 9 In the 1897 dissertation, Moore speaks of the relation between Appearance and Reality as neither logical nor causal “but as something between the two” (35). The possibility of such a kind of relation is precisely what he is denying in the passage just quoted.
- 10 My concern in this essay is with Moore’s attitude towards Kantian and post-Kantian Idealism, rather than with his attitude towards Berkeley’s form of Idealism. Note, however, that Moore takes the idea that the act of knowledge must be distinguished from the object of knowledge, and that the object is wholly independent of the act, to be effective against all these forms of Idealism. It is for this reason that he thinks that an argument which applies most obviously to Kantian and post-Kantian Idealism is in fact quite general, and effective also against Berkeleyan Idealism. See Moore 1903a; see also Russell 1912, ch. IV.
- 11 In Russell 1912 he speaks of “[t]he faculty of being acquainted with things other than itself” as “the main characteristic of a mind” (28).
- 12 In a letter to Moore, Bradley objects to Moore’s interpretation, saying that the “phrase ‘cut off’ etc. has been taken to imply *a going about to cut off* [i.e. a deliberate act] and therefore a previous idea. I never meant this” The letter is in the Moore Archives in Cambridge University Library.
- 13 This passage is in Moore (1899), 178f. The editors of Moore (2011) have also inserted it into their reprinting of Moore’s 1898 dissertation (at Moore 2011, 165) on the assumption that the passage originally occurred in that dissertation. See note 8.
- 14 In a letter to Russell dated September 11, 1898, about his 1898 fellowship dissertation, Moore says: “My chief discovery, which shocked me a good deal when I made it, is expressed in the form that an existent [i.e. an existing entity] is a proposition. I see now that I might have put this more mildly.” Quoted by Baldwin and Preti (Moore 2011, xxxi).
- 15 Moore to Desmond McCarthy, August 1892. The letter is in the Moore Archives in Cambridge University Library.
- 16 Russell held this Moorean view until 1918, except for a relatively brief period, roughly 1902–1905, when he held the theory of denoting concepts, which allows for a large number of exceptions to the Moorean view. The theory of denoting concepts is the view that he criticizes and rejects in “On Denoting” (Russell 1905). In that essay, he reverts (more or less) to the Moorean view of propositions and their constituents. See Hylton 1990b, ch. 5, especially 206–11.

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3

THE CHANGING ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

Scott Soames

Analytic philosophy didn't begin as a self-conscious revolt against earlier Idealism. It began with interest in new topics—logic, language, and mathematics—that hadn't been rigorously pursued before. The tradition started in 1879 when Frege invented modern logic with the aim of explaining how we can achieve certainty in mathematics. His strategy was to reduce higher mathematics to arithmetic, a process already underway, and then to reduce arithmetic to logic. To do this he had to develop a logic more powerful than any deriving from antiquity. The fact that his key semantic ideas could be adapted to spoken human languages doubled the achievement. For Frege, the function of language is to represent the world. For S to be meaningful is for S to represent the world as being a certain way—which is to impose conditions it must satisfy if S is to be true. In time, the idea became central to theories of linguistic meaning.

For Frege, numbers were whatever they had to be to explain our knowledge of them. The explanation was to come from logical definitions of arithmetical concepts. Arithmetical truths were to be logical consequences of the definitions plus self-evident logical axioms; empirical applications of arithmetical truths were to be logical consequences of those truths plus non-mathematically stated empirical truths. To achieve these ends, he defined *zero* as the set of concepts true of nothing, *one* as the set of concepts true of something, and only that thing, *two* is the set of concepts true of some distinct *x* and *y*, and nothing else, and so on. Since *being non-self-identical is true of nothing* it is a member of zero; since *being my wife* is true of Martha and only her, it is a member of the number one. Other integers follow in train. The successor of *n* is the set of concepts *F* such that for some *x* of which *F* is true, the concept *being an F which is not identical to x* is a member of *n*. Natural numbers are members of every set containing zero and

closed under successor. Multiplication is repeated addition, which is repeated application of the successor function. In this way arithmetic was to be derived from what Frege took to be logic. Were his definitions what we really mean by arithmetical terms? Frege, didn't try to settle this by asking speakers, or testing their "intuitions." For him the correct analyses were those that did the needed explanatory work.

Unfortunately, his system contained a contradiction found by Bertrand Russell, after which Russell inherited the task of reducing arithmetic to logic. He completed it in *Principia Mathematica*, using a more complicated version of Frege's ideas. Although he was mathematically successful, the complications—including the axioms of infinity and reducibility plus the ramified theory of types—that he had to introduce were philosophically costly.¹ Frege dreamed of deriving mathematics from self-evidently obvious logical truths, but some of Russell's complications were neither obvious nor truths of logic. Later reductions eliminated the worst complications, but the systems to which they reduced mathematics were not logical systems that govern reasoning about all subjects. They were versions of an elementary mathematical theory now called "set theory."

Despite this limitation, *Principia Mathematica* reinforced the idea of logical analysis as a powerful tool for addressing philosophical problems. Earlier, in "On Denoting," Russell achieved success by arguing that the logical forms of our thoughts are often disguised by the grammatical forms of sentences we use to express them. There, he introduced the idea of *incomplete symbols* that don't have meaning or reference in isolation—using, in the case of singular definite descriptions, his flawed "Gray's Elegy Argument."² Unfortunately, this dubious beginning foreshadowed philosophically more contentious "incomplete symbols" later on. The first of these was the basis of the infamous *no-class theory* of *Principia Mathematica*, which, in addition to purporting to eliminate both numbers and classes via creative logical analysis, also attempted to dispense with non-linguistic propositions and propositional functions.³

Following *Principia Mathematica*, Russell applied his reductionist program to material objects and other minds in *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914a) and *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (1918–19). The result was an epistemically driven, metaphysical system of logical atomism in which apparent talk of mind and matter is reduced to talk of momentary instantiations of perceptibly simple properties and relations.⁴ The relation between the resulting system and our pre-philosophical knowledge of the world was supposed to roughly parallel the relation between Russell's logicized version of arithmetic and our ordinary knowledge of arithmetic. Just as his logicist reduction didn't aim at giving us new arithmetical knowledge, but at validating that knowledge and exhibiting its connections with other knowledge, his logical atomism didn't (officially) aim at *adding* to our ordinary and scientific knowledge, but at validating it and exhibiting the connections holding among its parts.

Elaborating this idea, Russell says:

Every philosophical problem, when it is subjected to the necessary analysis and purification, is found to be not really philosophical at all, or else to be, in the sense in which we are using the word, logical.⁵

[P]hilosophical propositions ... must be *a priori*. A philosophical proposition must be such as can neither be proved or disproved by empirical evidence [P]hilosophy is the science of the possible Philosophy, if what has been said is correct, becomes indistinguishable from logic.⁶

Since Russell thought that *a priori* necessary connections were *logical* connections, he took explaining them to require *definitions*, as in the reduction of arithmetic to logic, or *reductive analyses*, as in his analysis of statements about material objects and minds as statements about perceptible simples. Although he spoke of “analysis,” that term was misleading, since his “analyses” of empirical statements weren’t even approximately equivalent to those statements. Thus, his system was less an *analysis* of our pre-philosophical world-view than a proposal to *replace* it with a revisionary metaphysics dictated by a view of *what reality must be like if it is to be knowable*. For Russell during this period, linguistic analysis was logical analysis, which required using logical tools to craft philosophically justified answers to what G. E. Moore in 1910 characterized as the most important job of philosophy, namely:

to give a general description of the whole Universe, mentioning all the most important things we *know* to be in it, considering how far it is likely that there are important kinds of things which we do not absolutely *know* to be in it, and also considering the most important ways in which these various kinds of things are related to one another. I will call this, for short, “Giving a general description of the *whole* Universe,” and hence will say that the first and most important problem of philosophy is: To give a general description of the *whole* Universe.⁷

In sum, language during this stage of the analytic tradition was both an object of study and, through its connection with the new logic, an all-purpose tool for doing traditional philosophy. Though the tool was often tied to questionable linguistic doctrines, it was also used in uncontentious ways to reveal defects in philosophical arguments and to frame objections to certain doctrines. One example is the critique in Russell (1910a) and Moore (1919–20) of the Absolute Idealist argument that all properties of an object, including its relational properties, are essential to it, and that, because of this, Reality is an interconnected whole every part of which is essential to every other part. As they show, that argument suffered from a scope ambiguity involving a modal operator. On one resolution the argument is logically invalid; on the other it is question begging.⁸

Another example is the critique in Russell (1908, 1909) and Moore (1907–08) of William James's theory that "true" means "what is useful to believe." Moore and Russell argue that James can't be right because, unlike the claim that *p* is true, the claim that *p* is useful to believe is neither equivalent to *p* nor a claim one is warranted in believing iff one is warranted in believing *p*.⁹ These examples, which don't invoke questionable linguistic doctrines to advance antecedent philosophical ends, illustrate the timeless relevance of language to philosophy.

The founding document of the second stage of the analytic tradition was Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Although both developed systems of logical atomism, Russell and Wittgenstein had starkly different philosophical visions. Whereas Russell offered an all-encompassing theory of what reality must be like if it is to be knowable, Wittgenstein offered an all-encompassing theory of what thought and language must be like if they are to represent reality. The *Tractatus* does, to be sure, begin with abstract metaphysics, but its metaphysical simples are never identified and no analyses of scientific or ordinary truths are given. Since, like Russell, Wittgenstein believed that all necessary, *a priori* connections are *logical* connections, he could have tried to give logical analyses of empirical statements, *had he shared Russell's view that the metaphysical simples that ground analysis could be informatively identified*. In fact, he believed it was *impossible* to identify them. Consequently, his meager metaphysics was a reflex of his vision of how language represents the world. He wanted, not to *do* metaphysics, but to *end* it by showing how it violates the principles governing intelligible thought and language.

For Wittgenstein propositions, as conceived by Frege, Russell, and Moore, don't exist. In their place we are given an analysis of representational language in which "propositions" are meaningful uses of sentences. As the *Notebooks 1914–1916* make clear, Wittgenstein saw this reconceptualization of the proposition as *the single great problem of philosophy*.

My whole task consists in explaining the nature of the proposition. (p. 39)

The problem of negation, of conjunction, of true and false, are only reflections of the one great problem in the variously placed great and small mirrors of philosophy. (p. 40)

Don't get involved in partial problems, but always take flight to where there is a free view over the whole of the *single* great problem. (p. 23)¹⁰

Wittgenstein's one great problem was to explain the essence of representational thought and language. This, he thought, was philosophy's only real task.¹¹

Apart from tautologies—which he took to *say nothing* and to be meaningful only in so far as they *show* us something (unstatable) about our symbolism—he assumed that for a proposition to be meaningful, it must tell us something about which possible state the world is in. He took it to follow that all intelligible

thoughts must be contingent and a posteriori. *Since he believed that philosophical propositions are never either one, he concluded that there are no genuine philosophical propositions, and, correspondingly, no philosophical problems.* For Wittgenstein, a sentence that is neither a tautology nor contradiction has meaning only if its truth, or its falsity, is guaranteed by elementary facts. Thus, he thought, there are no unanswerable questions and no inherently mysterious propositions. Anything about which we can speculate is a topic of scientific inquiry. Since philosophy isn't a science, philosophers are restricted to clarifying thought and language. Paradoxically, they are not to do this by discovering how language is related to the world. According to the *Tractatus*, there are no such truths to discover. Rather, since ordinary language disguises thought, they must strip off the disguise. This was *the linguistic turn in philosophy*.

The message resonated in Vienna. After operating informally for years, the Vienna Circle announced its existence in a manifesto dedicated to Moritz Schlick written by Rudolf Carnap, Hans Han, and Otto Neurath in 1929. Proclaiming an epochal new beginning in philosophy, the manifesto ended by listing members of the circle—including, in addition to the authors, Schlick, Gustav Bergmann, Herbert Feigl, Philipp Frank, Kurt Gödel, Viktor Kraft, Friedrich Waismann, and four others. It also listed those sympathetic to the circle, including Kurt Grelling, F. P. Ramsey, Hans Reichenbach, and seven others. Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein were hailed as *leading representatives of the scientific world-conception*.

The initial upshot was the phenomenalist rendering of the *Tractatus* sketched by Kraft:

Wittgenstein identified [atomic propositions] with the propositions he called “elementary propositions.” They are propositions which can be immediately compared with reality, i.e. with the data of experience. Such propositions must exist, for otherwise language would be unrelated to reality. All propositions which are not themselves elementary propositions are necessarily truth functions of elementary propositions. Hence all empirical propositions must be reducible to propositions about the given.¹²

With this conception in the background, the logical empiricists hoped to unify all science—i.e. to systematize all fact-stating discourse into a single integrated system. The primary activity of the philosopher was to be the logical analysis of the concepts of science and the structure of scientific theories. The first and most ambitious attempt to demonstrate the possibility of a unified science was Carnap (1928). It identified four domains: the *autopsychological* or phenomenal domain of a single mind, the physical domain, the *heteropsychological* domain of all psychological facts, and the broader cultural domain. Carnap claimed it was possible to reduce all domains to the autopsychological, and also to reduce all domains to the physical—where the direction of reduction was *not* supposed to confer

metaphysical prominence on the chosen base. The reduction to the autopsychological, to which he devoted by far the most attention, was hopeless.¹³ The metaphysical neutrality he attributed to the different imagined reductions was more significant, signaling an implicit holistic verificationism that was later to become prominent.¹⁴

The search for a precise, acceptable, statement of the *empiricist criterion of meaning* preoccupied the logical empiricists for decades. Significant milestones included Popper (1935), Ayer (1936), Carnap (1936–7), Ayer (1946), Church (1949), Hempel (1950), and Quine (1951). Since natural science had to count as cognitively meaningful, it was quickly recognized that neither conclusive verifiability (entailment of S by a consistent set of observation statements), conclusive falsifiability (entailment of the negation of S by a consistent set of observation statements), nor the disjunction of the two were necessary and sufficient for S's meaningfulness.¹⁵ Attention then focused on the idea that empirically meaningful statements earn their keep by contributing to the observational entailments of theories containing them. When tests of the meaningfulness of individual statements based on this idea were shown in Church (1949) and Hempel (1950) to fail spectacularly, the conclusion, drawn in Quine (1951), was that since confirmation is holistic, meaning must also be, *if cognitive meaning is to be identified with confirming experience*.¹⁶ Unfortunately for verificationism, the appeal to holism was insufficient to block reconstructed versions of the problems of non-holistic verificationism.¹⁷ Thus, the attempt to use philosophically inspired theories of meaning as all-purpose philosophical weapons suffered a setback.

The logical empiricists' attempt to reduce apriority and necessity to truth by convention suffered a similar fate. The linguistic theory of the *a priori*, advocated in Hahn (1933), held that *a priori* truths, paradigmatically those of logic, are both true and knowable without appeal to justifying experience because they are stipulated to be true by linguistic conventions adopted by speakers. Quine (1936) observed that since proponents recognize infinitely many such truths, they can't hold that speakers adopt a separate convention for each. Rather, they must maintain that speakers adopt finitely many conventions from which infinitely many *a priori* truths follow logically. But that won't do. Either the required logic is itself *a priori*, in which case what is supposed to be explained is presupposed, or the logic isn't *a priori*, in which case nothing it is used to derive is either.¹⁸ The attack on the conception of necessity as analyticity in Quine (1951) was similarly effective against logical empiricists, who maintained that necessity was problematic and incapable of being accommodated by empiricists unless it was explained as analyticity, which was assumed to be unproblematic.¹⁹

With these results, the key tenets of logical empiricism unraveled, and the analytic tradition entered its third stage, when it was divided between two main groups—one led by Quine, and the other led by Wittgenstein, Gilbert Ryle, John Austin, and Paul Grice. The first group tended to reject necessity, apriority, and the conception of philosophy as linguistic analysis, in favor of the idea of

philosophy as continuous with science. The second group continued to characterize philosophy as linguistic analysis, while insisting that the analysis was *not* logical analysis.

Neither group fared very well. Quine's skepticism about necessity, apriority, and analyticity extended to a host of other intensional, and *intentional*, notions. Challenged in Grice and Strawson (1956), which argued that *sameness of meaning* can't be repudiated without repudiating *translation* and *meaning* too, Quine obliged in *Word and Object* (1960). Challenged in Carnap (1955), which argued that meaning and reference are scientifically on a par, Quine repudiated reference in Quine (1969), leading, as I argue in Soames (2013), to an inadvertent *reductio* of his radically eliminativist position of *intension* and *intention*.

Ordinary language philosophers suffered from two main difficulties. The first, which crippled the anti-Cartesian, analytic behaviorism of Ryle (1949, 1953) while also undermining what might have been a salvageable insight behind the paradigm case argument in Malcolm (1942), was their inability to distinguish necessity from apriority and analyticity.²⁰ The second difficulty was their anti-theoretical approach to language. One can't successfully maintain that all philosophical problems are linguistic confusions that can be eliminated by understanding what words mean, without having an informative, well-confirmed theory of meaning. The slogan *Meaning is use!* isn't enough, since factors other than meaning affect our use of words. When this lesson was established in Grice (1967), the multiple failures to respect it—illustrated by Strawson's performative theory of "true,"²¹ Hare's performative theory "good,"²² and Austin's argument that empirical knowledge is sometimes possible without empirical evidence²³—triggered a collective realization that a more theoretical approach to language was needed.

Some found it in Davidson (1967a, b), which advocated finitely axiomatized theories the theorems of which are material biconditionals stating the truth conditions of sentences. For many philosophers, including some friendly to the ordinary language school, this idea connected them to a logical tradition they had once disdained. Tarski (1935) showed how to *define* truth for formal languages of mathematics; Tarski (1936) showed how to define *logical truth* and *logical consequence* for such languages. Following this, his work was routinely used to provide interpretations for formal languages. To give such an interpretation is to identify a domain of objects a language is to be used to talk about, to assign each name an object in the domain, each 1-place predicate a subset of the domain, and so on for all non-logical vocabulary. The interpretations of sentences are then derived from the interpretation of the vocabulary using recursive clauses encoding meanings in the logical vocabulary. The results are instances of the schema "*S*" is a true sentence of *L* iff *P*.

This conception of interpretation was familiar to logicians and philosophers from the 1930s through the 1960s. It was the simplest such conception that arose in the decades of unprecedented advances in logic that preceded Davidson. Among those advances was the establishment of "classical" logic. Looking back at

the heyday of logical empiricism, one finds that although there were many informal descriptions of philosophical analysis as *logical analysis*, the real study of logic and its relation to mathematics was largely independent of other philosophical concerns. Those were the years when logic and metamathematics were transformed by Gödel, Tarski, Church, and Turing. With the emergence of model theory (of the first and second-order predicate calculi), and of recursive function theory, as mature disciplines, logic and metamathematics separated themselves from earlier, more epistemological and metaphysical conceptions by focusing on rigorously defined scientific domains of study.

At the same time, a new logical subdiscipline, often called “philosophical logic,” was born. Whereas classic logic arose from the desire to advance our knowledge of the timeless, non-contingent subject matter of mathematics, philosophical logic arose from the desire to extend logical methods to new domains. The first steps were to formalize reasoning about the temporal and contingent. Proof-theoretic systems of the modal propositional calculus were given in Lewis and Langford (1932), followed by extensions to include quantification and, finally, the addition of model theories. Milestones included Marcus (1946), Carnap (1946, 1947), and Kripke (1958, 1963a, 1963b). Prior (1967) pioneered tense logic.

Modal logic introduced an operator, ‘ \Box ’, the prefixing of which to a classical logical truth produces a truth. Apart from initial confusion about precisely which notion was to be captured—logical truth, analyticity, or metaphysical necessity—the needed formal ideas soon emerged.²⁴ Since the new operator is defined in terms of truth at *model-like elements*, logical models for modal languages had to contain them, now dubbed *possible world-states*, thought of as *ways the world could have been*. This development strengthened the Fregean idea that for a (declarative) sentence *S* to be meaningful is for *S* to represent the world as being a certain way, which is to impose conditions the world must satisfy if *S* is to be true. With the use of modality, truth conditions were for the first time strong enough to approximate meanings. To learn *what the world would have to be like* to conform to how *S* represents it *is* to learn something approximating *S*’s meaning. This proved to be significant. Now we had a putative answer to the question *What is the meaning of a sentence?* plus a new way of studying linguistic meaning.

This is roughly where the philosophical study of linguistic meaning stood in the mid-1960s, when the analytic tradition was moving into its next historical stage. The arrival of that stage was decisively signaled by the revival of normative theory in John Rawls (1971) and the articulation, in Kripke (1972), of a philosophically important conception of necessity that was both non-linguistic and non-coextensive with apriority. From then on, philosophy was seldom identified with linguistic analysis. Today, what remains of the original impulses of the analytic tradition isn’t a set of doctrines, but a pattern of interests and ways of philosophizing. All the original interests—in logic, language, mathematics, and science—continue in new forms. Although logic and linguistic analysis are still important tools in advancing traditional concerns, the main philosophical interest in

language lies in contributing to the foundations of the emerging science of language and information. Whereas in earlier days of the tradition, language was often viewed as an easily grasped means to antecedent philosophical ends, today it is seen as the complex subject matter of a young science to which philosophers have already made great contributions, and to which they continue to add new ideas.

From the early 1960s to the present, philosophers and theoretical linguists have expanded the framework provided by intensional semantics to cover large fragments of human languages. The research program that started with the predicate calculi has been enriched to include more and more natural-language constructions. Familiar modal operators now include *it is necessarily the case that*, *it could have been the case that*, and *if it had been the case that* ____, *then it would have been the case that* ____. Operators involving time and tense have been treated along similar lines. Generalized quantifiers have been added, along with adverbs of quantification, and propositional attitude verbs such as *believe*, *expect*, and *know*. Philosophical logicians have also given us accounts of adverbial modifiers, comparatives, intensional transitives, indexicals, and demonstratives. At each stage, a language fragment for which we had a truth-theoretic semantics was expanded to include more features of natural language. As the research program advances, the fragments of which we have a good truth-theoretic grasp become more fully representative of natural language. Although one may doubt that all aspects of natural language can be squeezed into some version of this paradigm, there is little doubt that key elements of it will eventually find their place in a mature science of language and information.

Despite this progress, it would be wrong to think that the foundations of this science are already in place. If all that remained were to fill gaps in systems of intensional semantics and flesh out the empirical details of applying them to natural languages, philosophers would already have done most of what they needed to do to secure firm foundations for the aspiring science. But we haven't reached that point. While we have used truth conditions to *model* representational contents of sentences, we haven't paid enough attention to the demands that sentences place on their users. Given the history of formal semantics, it could hardly have been otherwise. When the chief goal was to capture the logical, analytic, and necessary consequences of mathematical and scientific statements, there was little need to focus on agents' use of their language for cognitive and communicative purposes, or to individuate thoughts beyond necessary equivalence. Now that the goal is a genuine science of language and information, there is.

It is well known that the identification of the proposition semantically expressed by S at a context C, its *semantic content at C*, with a function from circumstances of evaluation (pairs of times and world-states) to the truth value of S at C (and those circumstances) is too coarse grained to accommodate propositional attitudes and other hyperintensional constructions.²⁵ It is also known that quick fixes haven't worked.²⁶ It is less well known that this lack of success is related to conceptual issues about truth and representation. Meanings and semantic contents

are *interpretations* of (uses of) sentences on which speakers and hearers expect each other to converge. As such, they can't, on pain of regress, depend on further interpretation.

But interpretation is what sets of truth-supporting circumstances, or functions from such to truth values, require.²⁷ Is the set containing only world-states 1, 2, 3 true or false? Since it doesn't represent anything as being this way or that, it isn't either one. We could, if we wished, interpret it as representing the actual world-state as being in the set, and so as being true iff no state *outside* it were instantiated. We could also interpret it as representing the actual world-state as not being in the set, and so as being true iff no state *inside* it was instantiated. Without interpretation by us, neither the set, nor the related function, represents anything, or has truth conditions. Since propositions are primary bearers of truth, they aren't these sets or these functions.²⁸

Truth is, as Aristotle intimated, the property a proposition *p* has when the world is as *p* represents it. It is a property which, when predicated of *p*, gives us a claim we are warranted in accepting, believing, or doubting iff we are warranted in accepting, believing, or doubting *p*. Since we have to *presuppose* propositions to explain truth, truth isn't something from which propositions are constructed.²⁹ The same can be said about world-states, which are properties of making complete world-stories, the constituents of which are propositions, true. *Since both truth and world-states* are conceptually prior to propositions, they aren't building blocks from which propositions are constructed.³⁰

For these reasons propositions aren't what intensional semantics have said they are. Nor is the two-place predicate *true at w* the undefined primitive it has been taken for. If it were, then nothing about the meaning of *S* would follow from the theorem *For all world-states w, S is true at w iff at w, the earth moves*, just as nothing follows from the pseudo-theorem *For all world-states w, S is T at w iff at w, the earth moves*. To say that *S* is true at *w* is to say that *S* expresses a proposition that would be true if *w* were actual (instantiated).³¹ To understand *true at w* in this way is to presuppose prior notions of *the proposition S expresses* and *the monadic notion of truth* applying to it. Employing these, we appeal to the schema, *If S means, or expresses, the proposition that P, then necessarily the proposition expressed by S is true iff P* plus the theorem *S is true at w iff at w, the earth moves* to derive that *S* means, or expresses, some proposition necessarily equivalent to the proposition that the earth moves.³² In short, intensional semantics requires a conceptually prior notion of proposition, if it is to provide any information about meaning at all.³³

For all these reasons, the next major philosophical contribution to the foundations of a science of language and information must be an empirically defensible, naturalistic conception of propositions as primary bearers of truth conditions, objects of attitudes, meanings of some sentences, and contents of some mental states. By a *naturalistic* conception, I mean one capable of explaining both the relations all cognitive agents bear to them and the knowledge of them that normal humans have. By an *empirically defensible* conception, I mean one that offers new solutions

to (at least) some currently intractable problems—such as Frege’s puzzle,³⁴ Kripke’s puzzle about belief,³⁵ Perry’s problem of the essential indexical(s),³⁶ Jackson’s problem about knowing what red things look like,³⁷ Nagel’s problem about what it’s like to be a bat,³⁸ and Fine’s problem about recognizing recurrence.^{39,40} Fortunately, work along these lines is underway. Although no consensus has yet been reached, several similar, and largely complementary, research programs are pursued in King (2007), King, Soames, and Speaks (2014), Soames (2015a), Hanks (2015), Jespersen (2010, 2012, forthcoming, draft), and Moltmann (forthcoming).

Another foundational issue receiving attention is the distinction between two senses of meaning: the *semantic content* of an expression E vs what is required to fully *understand* E. The semantic content of E is what one’s use of it must express or designate, if that use is to conform to E’s meaning in the language. If, like the natural kind terms “water” and “gold,” E isn’t context-sensitive, then, ambiguity aside, a use of E is normally expected to contribute to its semantic content—e.g. the kinds H₂O and Au—to the illocutionary content of utterances of sentences containing E. If, like indexicals “I” and “now,” E’s semantic content is relativized to contexts, then one’s use of it in a context will standardly be expected to stand for its semantic content there—e.g. oneself and the time of utterance. Part of understanding E is, of course, having the ability to use it in conformity with its semantic content. But this isn’t all there is to understanding E. Nor is knowing, of the semantic content of E, that it is E’s content. In fact, that knowledge isn’t always either necessary or sufficient for understanding E. It’s not necessary, because when a proposition p is the semantic content of a sentence S, understanding S doesn’t require making p an object of thought.⁴¹ It’s not sufficient, since understanding S often requires a different sort of knowledge.⁴²

To understand a word, phrase, or sentence is to be able to use it in ways that meet the shared expectations that language users rely on for effective communicative interactions. This involves graded recognitional and inferential capacities on which the efficacy of much of our linguistic communication depends. Not only do “water” and “H₂O” have the same kind k as content, one can know, of k, that ‘water’ stands for it, and know of “k” that “H₂O” stands for it, without understanding either term, or knowing that they designate the same kind. Understanding each involves knowing the body of information standardly presupposed in linguistic interchanges involving each. This, I argue in Soames (2015a), can be used to solve recalcitrant instances of Frege’s puzzle.

A third foundational issue receiving attention is the relationship between the information semantically encoded by (a use of) a sentence (in a context) on the one hand and the assertions it is there used to make, the beliefs it is there used to express, and the information it is there used to convey on the other. In the past, it has often been assumed that the semantic content of a sentence is identical, or nearly so, with what one who accepts it thereby believes and with what one who utters it thereby asserts. But there is a growing recognition that this is far too

simple. As observed in Sperber and Wilson (1986), Recanati (1989), Bach (1994), Carston (2002)—and discussed at length in chapter 7 of Soames (2010b)—the contextual information available to speaker-hearers is much more potent in combining with the semantic content of the sentence uttered to determine the (multiple) propositions asserted by an utterance than was once imagined. Although the semantic content of *S* always contributes to the propositions asserted by utterances of *S*, that content isn't always itself a complete proposition, and even when it is, that content isn't always one of the propositions asserted. This, I believe, has far-reaching consequences for our understanding of the semantics and pragmatics of indexicals, demonstratives, incomplete definite descriptions, first-person and present-tense attitudes, perceptual and linguistic cognition, recognition of recurrence, and other aspects of language and language use.⁴³

If my list of foundational issues needing urgent attention isn't daunting enough, remember that I have so far raised them only for representational uses of language, which are not the only uses to which words are put. In addition to using declarative sentences to assert propositions, we use interrogative sentences to ask *questions* and imperative sentences to issue *orders* or *directives*. Although these are neither true nor false, they are illocutionary contents of linguistic performances that are closely related to assertive utterances that express propositions. Somehow the different sorts of contents—propositions, questions, and orders/directives—fit together as seamlessly as do uses of the interrogative, imperative, and declarative sentences that express them. Attention must also be paid to uses of declaratives that may have non-representational, or expressive, dimensions—e.g. epistemic modals and moral, or other evaluative, sentences. Needless to say, we don't yet have a unified theory of all this, but we are beginning to assemble the pieces.

In sum, the story of language in analytic philosophy since 1879 is one with several chapters. In chapter 1, language becomes, along with the new logic, the object of systematic philosophical inquiry aimed first at advancing the philosophy of mathematics and then at transforming metaphysics and epistemology. In chapter 2, vastly oversimplified models of language are mistaken for the real thing and used as philosophical weapons to sweep away metaphysics, normativity, and much of the traditional agenda of philosophy, in favor of a logico-linguistic conception of the subject. In chapter 3, ordinary language philosophers retain the conception of philosophy as linguistic analysis, while divorcing the latter from logical analysis, and continuing to identify epistemic and metaphysical modalities with linguistic modalities. At the same time, Quine and his followers retain the scientific spirit of the logical empiricists while rejecting the *intensional* and the *intentional*, along with meaning, reference, and analyticity. In chapter 4 the belief that language is the heart of philosophy finally dies and language again becomes just one of many objects of philosophical study. Only this time there is a difference. Thanks in part to philosophers such as Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Alfred Tarski, Alonzo Church, Saul Kripke, Richard Montague, and David Kaplan, the now mature disciplines of formal logic, philosophical logic, and

computation theory, have helped launch empirical sciences of language and information and their application, in theoretical linguistics, to natural languages. This is the enterprise that today's philosophers of language hope to advance. Having made so much progress, and fought through so many errors, we must expect the road ahead to be as challenging as the road behind, and the goal to be achieved—a mature science of language and information—to be as glorious as the mature disciplines—classical logic, philosophical logic, and the theory of computation—that have already achieved that status.

Notes

- 1 See sections 4 and 5 of chapter 10 of Soames (2014), plus the reply to Pigden in Soames (2015b).
- 2 See Nathan Salmon (2005) and section 5 of chapter 7 plus section 2.3 of chapter 8 of Soames (2014).
- 3 See Russell (1910b) and chapter 12 of Russell (1912). Also, Russell and Whitehead (1910) section 3 of chapter 3 of the Introduction, Soames (2014) sections 3–5 of chapter 9, and sections 4 and 5 of chapter 10.
- 4 Soames (2014, 621–9).
- 5 Russell (1914a, 42).
- 6 Russell (1914b, quoted at page 111 of the 1917 reprinting).
- 7 Moore (1953, 1–2).
- 8 Soames (2014, 414–19).
- 9 To which Russell added that James would have done better to frame his view as a theory of belief revision, rather than a theory of truth. See Soames (2014, 420–8).
- 10 Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2nd edition, 1979.
- 11 See chapter 1 of McGinn (2006) and chapters 1–3 of vol. 2 of Soames (forthcoming).
- 12 Page 117 of Kraft (1953 [1950]).
- 13 See Friedman (1987) and section 5 of chapter 6 of Soames (forthcoming).
- 14 See sections 2 and 3 of chapter 6 of Soames (forthcoming).
- 15 See chapter 13 of Soames (2003a).
- 16 *Ibid.*, chapter 13.
- 17 *Ibid.*, chapter 17.
- 18 For related criticism, see Soames (2013).
- 19 Soames (2003a), chapter 16. See also Soames (2013).
- 20 See chapters 3, 4, and 7 of Soames (2003b), and also Soames (2007).
- 21 Strawson (1949), critiqued in chapter 5 of Soames (2003b).
- 22 Hare (1952), critiqued in chapter 6 of Soames (2003b).
- 23 Austin (1962), critiqued in chapter 8 of Soames (2003b).
- 24 See Burgess (1998, 1999).
- 25 Soames (1987, 2008b).
- 26 Soames (1987, 2005a, 2006).
- 27 Soames (2010a).
- 28 See chapter 3 of King, Soames, and Speaks (2014), also chapter 1 of Soames (2015a).
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 See chapter 5, Soames (2010b).
- 31 It won't do to take the claim that *S is true at w* to say that *if w were instantiated, then S would be true*, because *S* might fail to exist, or *S* might exist but *not* mean what it actually means, at some world-state at which the earth moves.
- 32 Here “*S*” is a metalinguistic variable over sentences and “*P*” is a schematic letter.
- 33 Soames (2015a, 12–13).

- 34 See Salmon (1986).
- 35 See Kripke (1979).
- 36 See Perry (1977, 1979, 2001a, 2001b).
- 37 See Jackson (1986).
- 38 See Nagel (1974).
- 39 See Fine (2007) and Salmon (2012).
- 40 All these problems are addressed by the theory of propositions in Soames (2015a).
- 41 Soames (2015a), chapters 2 and 4.
- 42 Soames (2015a), chapter 4.
- 43 See Soames (2002, 2005b, 2005c, 2008a, 2009c, 2010a, and chapters 2–6 of 2015a).

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4

RUSSELL, RYLE, AND PHENOMENOLOGY

An Alternative Parsing of the Ways

James Chase and Jack Reynolds

“Analytic philosophy” does not, of course, exhaust philosophy *per se*. In current practice, the term contrasts the analytic tradition to much traditional philosophy and to much so-called “Continental” or “European” philosophy—hence the familiar, albeit contested, distinction. We have argued that methodological preferences and exclusions play a significant normative role in facilitating and constraining the kind of work done in both analytic and continental philosophy (Chase and Reynolds 2011), but in this chapter we examine two moments in the historical and methodological relationship between analytic philosophy and the largely continental tradition of phenomenology. A consideration of this relationship is of special interest to understanding the history of analytic philosophy. First, insofar as any continental “other” plays a *continuing role* in the self-image of the analytic tradition, in a manner that is more than mere stereotype, it is phenomenology; early in the tradition, phenomenological projects are marked out as problematic by such analytic philosophers as Russell, Carnap and Ryle; late in the tradition, philosophers such as John Searle and Daniel Dennett continue to distinguish their respective projects from apparently related ideas in phenomenology. Second, there is a close historical alignment in the emergence of analytic philosophy and phenomenology in the early 20th century, and in some aspects of their subsequent development, whether or not one endorses Michael Dummett’s claim that—like the Danube and the Rhine—they began from the same source but then develop increasingly independent and divergent trajectories (Dummett 1993). While Dummett’s own account was put forward as a challenge to earlier views that regarded analytic philosophy as essentially Anglo-American, precisely by emphasizing its Anglo-Austrian geographical and historical credentials, we argue here for the need to complicate Dummett’s somewhat linear story of gradual divergence.

Husserl and Early Analytic Philosophy

The story of the “parting of the ways” is well known, often accompanied by a summary of adversarial encounters between representatives of either side of the “divide” (see Friedman 2000; Moran 2010, 235–66; Chase and Reynolds 2011, 1–50), with phenomenologists such as Husserl and Heidegger on one side and “analytics” like Frege, Carnap, and Ryle ranged on the other. As Vrahimis 2013 and Glendinning 2007 emphasize, such tales are a retrospective judgment that is partly conditioned by contemporary discourse concerning the “divide.” They are also frequently accompanied by the postulation of a prior or future philosophical horizon that is claimed not to be subject to such a “rotten scene.” As such, they involve tacit narratives of progress or decline that are often highly selective,¹ although this does not entail (pace Vrahimis 2013) that they are pure fictions.

In their paper “What is wrong with contemporary philosophy?” Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons, and Barry Smith express concern that contemporary history of philosophy is often a mere tabulating of influences, rather than a project of elaborating the history of philosophical discoveries in the service of a conception of philosophy as a theoretical enterprise. It is precisely this sense of philosophy as a theoretical enterprise, capable of generating positive knowledge, that the authors celebrate in both the early analytic and the early phenomenological movements. And, setting out a version of Dummett’s origin story, they make it clear that this is the result of a kind of originating unity:

The honest pioneering spirit of the early and constructive phase of AP [analytic philosophy] had its close parallels also in the early phenomenologists, so much so that a century ago there existed no gulf between them.

(Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 2006, 67)

While there was indeed much commonality between the two early movements in terms of the agenda to which each responded, in our view the “no gulf” view is true only within bounds; the picture here is not that of furious engagement diminishing gradually over time as different interests take over. Instead, the actual engagement between the early analytics (Russell and Moore) and Husserl was meager in the first decades of the 20th century, precisely when a shared agenda existed and when potential engagement was plausibly at its greatest.

Husserl and Frege

Husserl’s interactions with Frege following the publication of his *Philosophie der Arithmetik* in 1891 are sometimes held out as the first encounter between the analytic and continental philosophical traditions, and the significance of the encounter has been extensively debated (notably, in Føllesdal 1958, Mohanty 1977, Mohanty 1982, Dummett 1993). In tracing the analytic reception of

phenomenology it is something of a side issue, however, as Husserl's development of the methods of phenomenology happened well after the episode.² Nonetheless, the episode does deserve mention here for two reasons. First, there may be some reason to see influence here in the *other* direction. At the modest end of such claims is the apparent fact that Frege's criticisms of Husserl's early psychologism are at least part of the story behind the production of the *Logical Investigations*. Claims of influence do go much further, notably, to Føllesdal's claim that Husserl's later notion of *noema* (the perceived as perceived) is a generalization of Fregean sense. Second, the later analytic interest in this very question is itself of note as an episode in the history of the tradition, part of a wider reinvention of analytic philosophy that took place after the Second World War (Chase and Reynolds 2011, 16–18). The re-evaluation of the importance of Frege's work for the analytic tradition has naturally drawn analytic attention to the topics and thinkers of greatest concern to Frege, and this in turn has made it easier for analytic scholars of Frege, such as Michael Dummett, to engage with Husserl.

Nonetheless, for our current purposes, the focus will instead be primarily on the reception of Husserl's early phenomenological work by Russell and Moore in their early analytic period. Whether or not Mulligan, Simons, and Smith are right to see no gulf between early phenomenology and the early analytic tradition in other respects, the extent of Russell's or Moore's engagement with phenomenology remains marginal and in need of some explanation.

Husserl's Logical Investigations and English Philosophy

Husserl's phenomenological turn dates from his *Logical Investigations* (*LI*), which were published in two volumes (the *Prolegomena to Pure Logic* in 1900 and the second, *Investigations in Phenomenology and the Theory of Knowledge*, in two parts in 1901). The *Logical Investigations* is born in large part from Husserl's dissatisfaction with his earlier "psychologismus," or grounding of mathematics and logic upon psychology: it investigates (pure) logic³ as the form of knowledge, or the theory of the ideal conditions for all possible theories or sciences—that is to say, the theory of the ideal conditions for "the possibility of truth in general, and again of deductive unity in general" (Husserl 2001, 149). Husserl's characterization of logic in these terms, those of truth and deductive consequence, is influenced by Bernard Bolzano, who was relatively unknown at the time, and as such it has a somewhat modern air—it was not until the 1930s that formal logical systems were standardly characterized in terms of consequence relations rather than in terms of sets of truths.

The six investigations in *LI* concern variously the nature of expressive language, our awareness of universals, a part/whole distinction that grounds a theory of analyticity, and an attempt to characterize the nature of intentional acts (and to propose a considerably more nuanced account than Brentano's own). Almost all

of these projects have obvious affinities with the philosophical activities of Russell and Moore at the time. Yet at the time, these positive projects within *LI* were discussed much less than the *Prolegomena*, in which Husserl (strongly influenced by Frege) presents his case against psychologism. Husserl's arguments here controvert not only the major proponents of psychologism in England and Germany, but also earlier forms of anti-psychologism, notably the claim that a psychological grounding of logic could not account for its normativity. As a consequence, as Vrahimis notes, "Husserl's *Prolegomena* became the Ur-Text of German-speaking philosophy between 1900 and 1914" (Vrahimis 2013, 24): within that period critiques of Husserl's form of anti-psychologism had been published by Natorp, Heymans, Rickert, Kroner, Jerusalem, Michaltschew, Erdmann, Schlick, and many others (see Kusch 1995, chapter 5).

Its role as an anti-psychologistic tract appears to be the only aspect of *LI* that received any attention in British philosophy journals at the time, generally in the context of the German "psychologismus" debate.⁴ Recent research on the landscape of British philosophy at the time has usefully gone beyond those contacts and influences acknowledged in published sources and other written work, exploring both more minor figures and less direct influences; for instance with exploration of the intellectual milieu of the Aristotelian Society by Omar Nasim (2014), and with Maria van der Schaar's analysis of the impact of G. F. Stout's 1896 work *Analytic Psychology* on the emerging views of his past students, Russell and Moore (van der Schaar 2013). For present purposes, it is Stout's twin role, as a transmitter of ideas from Brentano's school of psychology and a longstanding editor of *Mind*, that is relevant. Stout's interest in the nature of judgment and its object stand behind his interest in the German-language debate over psychologism, and he regularly arranged for reviews of the appearing monographs in *Mind* (for instance, Russell's well-known reviews and articles on Meinong's work were arranged by Stout). This is a matrix at least partly favorable to the consideration of Husserl's work by British philosophers, and from 1900 to 1913 Husserl is discussed tangentially on four occasions in the pages of *Mind* (MacIntyre 1906, Moore 1910, Moore 1911, Alexander 1913). Two of these are reviews by Moore (of August Messer's *Empfindung und Denken* and Dimitri Michaltschew's *Philosophische Studien*, each extensively critical of Husserl's position on the role of psychology in logic). Moore's mentions of Husserl are again passing, but they do make clear Moore's awareness of not only the psychologism debate but also Husserl's division between the matter and quality of intentional acts (a distinction introduced in the Fifth Investigation). Book reviews aside, the only early engagement with Husserl in British philosophical publications appears to be a lengthy footnote in Samuel Alexander's 1913 paper "Collective Willing and Truth," in which Alexander again refers to the *LI* with reference to anti-psychologism, but then goes on to defend his view against Husserl's claim that it would be absurd to regard logic as a science of realities (Alexander 1913, 39).

Husserl and Russell

Russell's own early attitude to Husserl's work has been the subject of scholarly curiosity since at least the 1950s, when Russell received queries from Herbert Spiegelberg on the subject, a situation prompted in part by Russell's relative silence on Husserl and phenomenology in both published work and private correspondence.⁵ In later life, Edith Russell explained to one questioner (Federico Gusberti-Cazzani) that:

He [Russell] wishes me to say that long ago he read Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, but he thought that his work, like that of Meinong, lost its value in view of his own, Lord Russell's, theory of descriptions. He has not read any of Husserl's subsequent work.

(Russell 1961)

If so, one might expect to see something like the trajectory shown in Russell's published work on Meinong, which shifts from sympathetic engagement before Russell's work on descriptions to a less liberal mood thereafter, as Russell takes on theoretical commitments that allow him to avoid Meinongian threats to the foundations of his philosophical logic (Lackey 1973, 18–19; Smith 1985).

The *LI* were drawn to Russell's attention very soon after publication by Couturat (Schmid 2001, #82). The critique of psychologism was certainly amenable to the realism of Russell and Moore, and it seems possible that this aspect of the *LI* was enough for Russell to regard the early Husserl as something of an ally in the three-way debate that was underway in British philosophy, between realism, idealism, and pragmatism. However, it also seems possible that this is the only volume of the *LI* Russell had read: in his 1924 popular survey article "Philosophy in the Twentieth Century" Russell describes the *LI* as "a monumental work published in 1900, [that] soon began to exert a great effect" (Russell 1928, 53). The publication date given here by Russell is that of the first volume of the *LI* (the *Prolegomena*), and Russell brackets Frege, Husserl, and Meinong together as part of a "revolt against German idealism," carried out "from a severely technical standpoint" (Russell 1928, 53).

Between the conclusion of Russell's work on *Principia Mathematica* in 1910 and the outbreak of the war in 1914, Russell was concerned to secure the epistemological foundations of logic, a project broadly of the same kind as Husserl's in the *LI*. His major unpublished work in this period, the 1913 manuscript *Theory of Knowledge* (Russell 1984), shows parallels with particular themes explored in the *LI* (for instance, with Husserl's classification of mental acts⁶), set within a general project of grounding our knowledge of logical terms in the cognitive relation of acquaintance, and of demonstrating the contribution that acquaintance with logical form plays in all acts of judgment (and so in all complex thought). Wittgenstein's criticism of the associated multiple relations theory of judgment forced the

abandoning of the project, with Russell temporarily moving away from foundational issues to the constructive possibilities of the new methods in philosophy (Smith 1985, 310). His Lowell lectures, collected as *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy* (1914), are a showcase of the new methods of analysis on a range of topics, including the nature of the external world, continuity, infinity, and causation.

Russell's wartime activities led to the suspension of his philosophical work for some time, but his return to philosophy marks another potential engagement. The *LI* was one of the many books Russell had access to in his period in Brixton prison in 1918; in a letter to Husserl on 19 April 1920 Russell mentions having read it (Russell 1920), and having planned a review of it in *Mind*, and the planned review is also mentioned in his correspondence with Stout while in prison (Russell 1918). It is clear that Russell had returned to the foundational issues considered in his *Theory of Knowledge* (and indeed to the multiple relations theory of judgment, which is rather cautiously discussed in his pre-prison 1918 lectures "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism"). After completing his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* in May, Russell spent the remainder of his period in prison reading works in psychology, working on his "prison question" as to whether neutral monism was more than a mere convenience allowing for an escape from Wittgenstein's criticisms of the multiple relations theory (Monk 1996, 525).

The possibilities of engagement here have to be treated with some caution. One reason for this is simply that Russell's positive research program was well underway by now. Robert Brandom suggests that analytic philosophy can be seen as centred around a "classical project of analysis," in which the resources of one vocabulary are used to make sense of (analyse, define, reduce, paraphrase, translate) another vocabulary (Brandom 2008, 1–2). Whether or not this is a useful device for understanding the whole tradition, many of Russell's investigations and exemplars of analysis through the early 20th century are of just this pattern. By the time of Russell's apparent engagement with the *LI* in 1918, in effect a kind of coherence-building argument from theoretical virtue had become available to him, arguably precluding any serious engagement with the emerging phenomenological tradition. But it seems to us that potential engagement was also very much hampered at this time by the direction in which Russell was traveling. Much of Russell's reading while in prison was behaviorist psychology, and soon after (in early 1919) Russell began what became an extended correspondence with the founder of behaviorism, the American psychologist John Watson, sending Watson the manuscript of *The Analysis of Mind* for comment before its publication. It is very clear that Russell's goals at the time were quite different from those of Husserl: in Russell's words, "I still wish to rescue the physical world from the idealist. But if I could rescue the so-called 'mental world' from him too!" (Russell in Monk 1996, 535). Yet given this goal, it is difficult to see why Russell arranged to have the *LI* present in the prison cell at all. Coming to Husserl's later investigations at this stage, the Husserlian characterization of the objects of subjective

presentations would simply seem to Russell to be an elaboration of what he by this stage took to be the basic error of Brentano and Meinong (Russell 1921, 14–19).

Between Russell and Ryle

The lack of fruitful analytic engagement with Husserl's early realist phenomenology in the first decade of the twentieth century can perhaps be seen as a missed opportunity, as can Russell's failure to write the projected review of *LI*. However, from that time other factors come into any explanation of the relative neglect of Husserl by the early analytic philosophers. One of these is Husserl's own move away from an unambiguously realist position. It is not unsurprising that the publication of the *Jahrbuch*, and Husserl's so-called transcendental turn (usually dated from about 1906/7), saw Husserlian phenomenology aligned with different camps in the British and American debate. Although Husserl does not seem to have firmly embraced idealism until his 1917–18 Fichte lectures (Moran 2004, 89), it was clear that he had shifted from the realism of the so-called Gottingen period much earlier, and the *Jahrbuch* was enthusiastically reviewed by George Dawes Hicks and Bernard Bosanquet (Hicks 1913–14, Bosanquet 1914). Through the next decade, it was Hicks and Bosanquet, among British philosophers, who seriously integrated an assessment of Husserl's work into their own versions of idealism, producing more points of potential engagement that simply failed to spark local interest, perhaps because of the declining stocks of idealism in British philosophy in this period. For instance, Husserlian arguments were employed by Hicks in roundtable discussions with Moore, Stout and others at the Aristotelian Society in 1913 and 1916, part of what Nasim (2014, 14) has characterized as a long and sustained debate within the Society about the nature of the external world. Hicks also organized Husserl's 1922 visit to lecture at University College of London, an event that was attended by Moore (who chaired the fourth lecture) and Stout, as well as by a young Ryle. This was a conspicuous failure from the point of view of engagement with Husserl for British philosophy at large (Speigelberg 1981, 156), perhaps excepting the influence that Husserl's thought would have upon Ryle. Again, extensive use was made of Husserl's work (both the *LI* and the *Ideas*) in Bosanquet's 1920 work *Implication and Linear Inference*. In reviewing Bosanquet's book, C. D. Broad welcomed the engagement with Husserl, while also sounding a theme that becomes something of a trope in British commentary on phenomenology hereafter:

it is pleasant to see that at least one English philosopher of eminence recognises the importance of Husserl's work, which has been strangely neglected here, possibly on account of its extreme prolixity and its barbed-wire entanglement of new technical terms.

(Broad 1920, 323)

Phenomenology and Ordinary Language Philosophy

It is widely observed that it is after World War 2, and in the 1950s, that the “divide” between analytic and continental philosophy becomes entrenched (Glendinning 2007, G. Warnock 1982, M. Warnock 2002). There is some truth to such claims, especially as concerns the socio-political institution of the “divide.” Key analytic journals like *Philosophical Studies* (1950) are established. There is a shift in focus that occurs at Harvard University around the time that Quine becomes chair in 1956, and the “Society of Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy” is conceived of at this time by John Wild at Harvard, and has its first conference in 1962 after Wild leaves Harvard for Northwestern.⁷ In Europe, the infamous Royaumont colloquium is staged just outside of Paris in 1958, the failure of which is said to testify to the “abyss.” In this same year, Geoffrey Warnock publishes *English Philosophy since 1900*, noting and indeed arguing for such a vast “gap,” and Mary Warnock has recently endorsed this view, noting in her memoir that there was “deep hostility at Oxford and Cambridge” for the philosophy coming from Continental Europe (Warnock 2002, 85).

In addition, major representatives of either side of the ostensible “divide” make remarks that seem to accord with a thesis regarding the “parting of the ways.” Georges Bataille says there is an “abyss” between these modes of doing philosophy that is much greater than that between French and German philosophy (Bataille 2004, 112). In 1957 R. M. Hare makes similar remarks to an audience in Germany (see Glendinning 2007, 75), and Gabriel Marcel, having had some experience as a visiting professor at Harvard and Aberdeen, noted that:

Experience shows us undeniably that in most of the Anglo-Saxon world the word “philosophy” is taken in an absolutely different sense than it is where phenomenology, proceeding from Husserl and Scheler, has progressively exerted its influence

(Marcel 1973, 17–18)

None of these accounts can be simply denied, of course, but the question is how we are best to understand them, and whether they serve to confirm or to complicate (as we will suggest) something like Dummett’s influential story. There are, after all, also an array of extra-philosophical factors that need to be considered in their connection with such events, including the Second World War, which philosophers rarely consider (but see Akehurst 2008, Vrahimis 2013). However one wants to approach those extra-philosophical questions, it is also important to note that even on the explicit philosophical and methodological level what takes place is not just a move of exclusion in relation to phenomenology. On the contrary, phenomenology is intermittently brought within or conceived of as complementary to ordinary language philosophy.

It is during this same period that various “giants” of analytic philosophy seriously considered calling their own work phenomenology. Wittgenstein had entertained such a move as early as 1930, returning to such themes in his *Remarks on Colour* (from the late 1940s⁸). J. L. Austin said in 1956 in “A Plea for Excuses”: “I think it might be better to use, for this way of doing philosophy, some less misleading name than those given above—for instance ‘linguistic phenomenology’, only that is rather a mouthful” (1961, 130). While a sustained discussion of phenomenology by Austin cannot be found, it nonetheless seems to be an exaggeration, to contend, as Anthony Manser does (1975, 111), that this remark has nothing to do with classical phenomenology, since in this period Charles Taylor had been invited to Austin’s famous Saturday morning meetings precisely to inform the audience about the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his book, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Warnock 2002, 32). In 1958 Ryle accepts at Royaumont that *The Concept of Mind* “could be described as a sustained essay in phenomenology, if you are at home with that label” (Ryle 2009a, 196). We will see this is far from a flippant remark shortly, and Wilfrid Sellars also declared that, “for longer than I care to remember, I have conceived of philosophical analysis (and synthesis) as akin to phenomenology” (1978, 170). Again, it would be a mistake to regard Sellars’ position here as having nothing to do with classical phenomenology, but merely referencing, say, qualia. Sellars’ Notre Dame lectures show his interest in classical phenomenology throughout the 1950s, and the quoted remark was made in dialogue with the well-known phenomenologist, J. L. Mohanty.⁹

Ambivalence towards phenomenology might ensue simply because of confusion about the nature of the movement or its potential significance. But *pace* Dummett, increasing indifference, rather than occasional outbreaks of aggressiveness and flirtations with a co-option of the very name “phenomenology,” would be a better sign of increasingly divergent trajectories. Moreover, the Dummettian model fails to capture the manner in which this ambivalence appears to have been partly prompted by the perception of philosophical and methodological proximity, rather than simply intransigent opposition. Any perceived proximity with phenomenology would have been uncomfortable for the emerging analytic tradition and its practitioners, potentially threatening the socio-political institution of analytic philosophy via its claim to have distinct methods and ways of doing philosophy (Preston 2007, xi), as well as because of the role of Germany in World War Two. In what follows, then, we seek to exhibit the historical and methodological significance of phenomenology to the ordinary language tradition via Ryle (drawing on Thomasson 2002), and suggest that the polemics of this period is partly the result of an inchoately perceived proximity with phenomenology.

Gilbert Ryle

While a lot has been written about Wittgenstein and phenomenology, much less has been written about Ryle and phenomenology (but see Thomasson 2002 and

Gallagher 2016). And yet Ryle's engagement with phenomenology was both deeper, and, contrary to common acceptance, sustained throughout his long career.¹⁰ It began with an early book review of Roman Ingarden in *Mind* in 1927 and ended with his 15-page intellectual autobiography that devotes two pages to phenomenology (Thomasson 2002, 116). Ryle was a supporter of phenomenology in various ways: he taught and read Husserl seriously, and wrote several papers on phenomenology, as well as others that were indebted to phenomenological insights. Ryle was also sometimes a prime antagonist of phenomenology, including at the Royaumont colloquium, in his 1946 review of Marvin Farber's book where he describes the proprietary method of phenomenology as a "sham," and perhaps also in his rejection of the famous film-maker Terrence Malick's proposed PhD thesis topic on Heidegger and Wittgenstein and "world" at Magdalene College in the late 1960s—Ryle held that it was not sufficiently philosophical (Critchley 2002), just as he also told Daniel Dennett (his PhD student) that there was little to be gained in this area (Dennett 1996; cf. Gallagher 2016). This might be said to attest to Ryle's own view that philosophers should not embrace any given "ism" or movement, but there is some ambivalence in his treatment of phenomenology, which may reflect both difficulties in his own meta-philosophical labours and the fact that many of his most famous philosophical moves have a phenomenological ancestry.

In 1929 Ryle had published a review in *Mind* of *Being and Time*, before Carnap's influential critique of Heidegger in 1932. Ryle's review oscillates between a strong rebuke of Heidegger's "self-ruinous subjectivism" and "mysticism" and much more sympathetic treatment. In this period when Ryle firmly subscribed to the linguistic turn he is also at pains to note that phenomenology is not to be confused with phenomenalism, and evinces some fairly substantial agreement with Husserl, while expressing reservations about the idea of essential intuition and a certain kind of Platonism about meaning he attributed to Husserl (Ryle 2009a). An engagement with phenomenological ideas is also apparent in "Categories" (1937) and the influence perdures in *The Concept of Mind*, with Ryle drawing on Husserl to put forward his famous idea of a category error, an idea that generally presupposes a stark distinction between philosophical and scientific language, with the prime instance of a category error being to look for the physical place or location of the mind. Indeed, throughout his career, Ryle always held that it was wrong to confuse philosophy and science. In "Systematically Misleading Expressions" in 1932, for example, he argued that "the philosophy of physics is indifferent to the answers that physicists give to the questions of physics," and that "Philosophical methods are neither scientific nor unscientific" (Ryle 2009a, 176). Similar sentiments occur in *The Concept of Mind*: "The book does not profess to be a contribution to any science, not even to psychology. If any factual assertions are made in it, they are there through the author's confusion of mind" (Ryle 2009a, 196). Many phenomenologists would concur with such an understanding, including Husserl, and, in recent times, Dan Zahavi, who does so in what he and

Amie Thomasson take to be the simultaneously Husserlian and Rylean language of “category error” (Zahavi 2013, 23–42; cf. Thomasson 2002). Overgaard 2010 also makes this point, and this position has been reprised in recent times by Paul Ricoeur in his book with the neuroscientist Jean-Pierre Changeux, where Ricoeur averts to another ordinary language philosopher, P. F. Strawson, at several important moments in the text (Changeux and Ricoeur 2000). In related fashion, in the *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, Michael Bennett and P. M. S. Hacker draw on Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophy to criticize what they take to be conceptual errors in neuroscience and some related philosophy for committing what they call the mereological fallacy of attributing person-level processes and terms to subpersonal mechanisms and then taking the latter to explain the former. This is akin to a position held by many (but not all) classical phenomenologists and it also invokes the notion of a category mistake (see Bennett and Hacker 2003).

But to return to Ryle’s ambiguous position, he opens up a space for phenomenology as a potentially viable project between science and logical analysis. He writes in his autobiography: “The conviction that the Viennese dichotomy ‘Either Science or Nonsense’ had too few ‘ors’ in it led some of us, including myself, to harbour and to work on a derivative suspicion ... ‘Conceptual analysis’ seems to denote a permissible, even meritorious exercise ...” (1970, 10–11). And his understanding of conceptual analysis is such as to allow a role for what has been called phenomenology, albeit with the first-person perspective divested of any claims to incorrigibility. As such, Ryle is metaphilosophically proximate with some core aspects of classical transcendental phenomenology, albeit rather more sanguine about the idea of a presuppositionless starting point. But Ryle also quite frequently characterizes the *differences* between his view and that of the German phenomenologists in terms of their relationship to science. In fact, the trope of phenomenology as anti-science arguably owes as much to Ryle as it does to Carnap and post-Quinean naturalists. Retrospectively thinking about his career, Ryle notes that on being granted his professorship at Oxford in the early 1920s, philosophers could no longer “pretend that philosophy differed from physics, chemistry and biology by studying mental as opposed to material phenomena” (Ryle 2009b, vii) and he laments the lack of any such engagement in his 1929 review of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, despite his own work of that era advocating an “indifferentism.” Questions to do with the relationship between philosophy and science are also a key feature of Ryle’s contributions to the infamous Royaumont meeting. While Ryle’s criticisms of phenomenology are not wholly out of line with earlier remarks, they constitute a rhetorically stronger position that has become part of the folklore of the “divide,” even if sometimes erroneously.¹¹ Ryle pointedly notes that Husserl philosophizes as if he had never met a scientist, and adds: “British thinkers have showed no inclination to assimilate philosophical to scientific enquiries; and *a fortiori* no inclination to puff philosophy up into the Science of sciences” (Ryle 2009a, 188–9). Ryle hence rebukes

phenomenologists for holding what he polemically calls the “Fuehrer” view of philosophy as queen of sciences. There are certainly phenomenologists who resist this view, like Merleau-Ponty, if not also Husserl himself, at least in some of his writings. For our purposes, however, the point is less to reject Ryle’s reading of phenomenology than to note the contrast between such rhetoric and the strong distinction between philosophy and science that Ryle himself drew throughout his career. His claim seems to be that the phenomenological efforts to “separate” philosophy and science are forms of first philosophy, whereas his own “separatism” commits him to no such hierarchical view of the role of philosophy. But is this sort of “separatism without possibility of conflict/competition” view of the relationship between philosophy and science significantly distinct from Husserl’s own view? We cannot settle the complex question of how to best interpret transcendental phenomenology here, but it appears that there is at least some meta-philosophical proximity between Husserl and Ryle.

There is also some agreement between Ryle and phenomenologists on more specific philosophical topics. In Ryle’s philosophy, for example, there is an emphasis on the primacy of practical over theoretical knowledge that appears congruent with many phenomenological reflections. Moreover, this topical affinity seems to derive in at least some measure from the historical influence of his reading of phenomenology. Thomasson claims, for example, that:

Ryle was unlikely to be familiar with the material from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* before writing *The Concept of Mind*, much less before the earlier “Knowing How and Knowing That” (1946), whereas he was obviously thoroughly acquainted with *Being and Time* by the time his lengthy discussion piece on it appeared in 1929.

(Thomasson 2002, 130)

Thomasson’s claim here is perhaps a little strong. Wittgenstein’s “practical turn” was announced well before the *Investigations*, and Ryle was certainly aware of the content of the Blue and Brown Books, for example. While Thomasson quotes G. E. L. Owen saying the junior Oxford philosophers in 1949 thought the Blue and Brown Books not closely related to Ryle’s method, this is debatable as a philosophical claim and one source does not seem sufficient to warrant the historical conclusion. It seems more likely that both Wittgenstein and Heidegger were significant influences upon Ryle here. Nonetheless, Thomasson is right to see “Knowing-how and know-that” as indebted to *Being and Time* in some significant respects.

Of course, there is a famous flirtation with philosophical behaviorism in *The Concept of Mind* in which self-knowledge is said to be no different from knowledge of others, with similar methods deployed in each case (Ryle 2009c, 137–8). Despite this *prima facie* opposition with phenomenology, however, much of what goes on in the book is less strident about this, hence Ryle’s commonly

reported claim to being only “one arm and a leg a behaviourist.” Moreover, this ostensible opposition can also be attenuated in the other direction. Ryle’s considered position actually appears quite closely related to views held by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty: that is, that there is an asymmetry between the first and the third-person perspectives, but that this is not a question of epistemic privilege, beyond some minimal sense of awareness or ownership of our own experiences. These phenomenologists will also tend to emphasize projects and practice, even direct perception of the embodied other in at least some emotional expressions, and the lack of need for inference in those cases, in ways that can appear “one arm and one leg a behaviourist.”

Although Ryle does not consider phenomenology in *Dilemmas* (1952), he develops his metaphilosophical views there in a manner that distances his work from behaviorism and better illustrates this curious proximity. In a chapter on perception, Ryle holds that “A person can suffer from a vitamin deficiency without knowing what vitamins are, much less that he is short of them. But he cannot see or remember or wonder without knowing both that he is doing so, and what it is that he is doing” (Ryle 1952, 101). Likewise, Ryle contends that “whereas the question whether I have won the race, checkmated my opponent, or scored a bull’s eye can be decided at least not worse and often better by someone other than by myself, the question of whether I have seen or heard something does not ordinarily get or need an umpire He is as expert an umpire and as favorably situated an umpire as anyone could be” (Ryle 1952, 107). Here we get an emphasis upon the asymmetry between first and third-person perspectives, and he adds: “neither the physiologist nor the psychologist nor I myself can catch me in the act of seeing a tree—for seeing a tree is not the sort of thing in which I can be caught” (Ryle 1952, 102). Ryle even says that “one source of this dilemma is, I have tried to show, the natural but mistaken assumption that perceiving is a bodily process or state, as perspiring is ...” (Ryle 1952: 109). While Ryle is tricky on this point, these remarks appear to deny (or are at least agnostic about) what is today called ontological naturalism, and they are quite closely related to Merleau-Ponty’s arguments about embodiment and perception in *Phenomenology of Perception*, albeit obviously inflected from a more linguistic direction than Merleau-Ponty at this point in his career. There may be the potential for a “double phenomenology” that is mutually enriching here, as Shaun Gallagher notes, which takes classical phenomenological considerations as a fallible starting point, but complements those predominantly first-personal considerations with second-personal analyses of how one speaks, thereby doing something like a second-person phenomenology (Gallagher 2016). Whatever one’s verdict on this possibility that Gallagher argues for at greater length, our claim is that this proximity is a factor in Ryle’s enduring ambivalence in regard to phenomenology. Rather than radical difference motivating the polemos of the period, in Ryle’s case it is the proximity that is both a philosophical stimulant but also a cause of potential concern. While there are principled reasons behind many

of his criticisms, he also swings between understanding his project and the phenomenological one as broadly compatible, and an incompatibilist position in which the situation is represented as phenomenology *or* ordinary language philosophy, with the latter claim usually being made on the basis of perceived neglect of science, but in a manner that could, arguably, also be applied to his own metaphilosophy and the irenic separation that it usually insists on between philosophy and science.

Conclusion

We have seen that the dominance of ordinary language philosophy at Oxford both owes something genetically to phenomenology (via Ryle's indebtedness to phenomenology), and exhibits some metaphilosophical and methodological proximities with classical phenomenology and some quite closely allied views concerning perception, know-how, the asymmetry between first and third-person perspectives. The case here has been prosecuted in regard to Ryle, but others have made similar claims about Strawson (cf. Overgaard 2010) and Wittgenstein. Of course, even had a rapprochement emerged at Royaumont, as Overgaard (2010) suggests it might, it may not have lasted long given that ordinary language philosophy was quickly ushered from its central role in the analytic pantheon in the early 1960s. Many philosophers today will conclude that a phenomenology–ordinary language unity ticket is not the best way of conceiving the philosophical task today, at least if it is beholden to a stark distinction between philosophy and science. But whatever one's verdict on this, we have aimed to propose an alternative parsing of the ways to the “parting of the ways” narrative made famous by Dummett, but also tacitly committed to by many others, in which from a common source or origin, two increasingly divergent inheritances of philosophy appear, that ultimately have next to nothing in common. Notwithstanding a commonality of philosophical concerns, the emergence of the analytic tradition with Russell and Moore is, on the contrary, marked by a surprisingly meager engagement with the early phenomenology, and the period of the socio-political institution of the “divide” after World War Two is both historically and philosophically much more complicated and intertwined than the Dummettian image allows.

Notes

- 1 There is a picking and choosing that occurs in such historical reflections that is frequently one-sided. A good example is Wolfgang Huemer's claim that “there was serious interest in phenomenology among early analytic philosophers like Bertrand Russell, Gilbert Ryle, and even among some members of the Vienna Circle. These historical studies have provided a more accurate perspective on the history of twentieth-century philosophy, bringing to an end the myth of the big and insuperable gap between analytic philosophy and the phenomenological movement” (Huemer 2005, 2). This may be

- true in regard to Ryle, but Russell's promised review of *Logical Investigations* does not constitute serious interest. Claims like this are legion. Although not false, they are often only a small part of the historical story.
- 2 Although the two briefly corresponded again in 1906 the subjects discussed then were similar to those of their earlier correspondence. Rosado Haddock points out also that Frege makes use of an example from Husserl's *Logical Investigations* in a letter of 1919 (Rosado Haddock 2008, 104).
 - 3 As opposed to "practical" logic, the formal calculi and other techniques that perhaps come to mind when logic is mentioned today.
 - 4 By contrast, under the influence of Royce and Munsterberg, American philosophy at the time appears to have attended to Husserl's positive work as much as the polemic against psychologism; cf. for instance Royce's early positive notice of "phenomenological analysis" in Royce (1902). Harvard University had significant connections with Germany both sides of the Great War, with many Harvard students studying with Husserl, including J. Leighton, W. Hocking (Husserl's first American student in 1902), and Winthrop Bell, who supervised Dorion Cairns. This may explain the manner in which certain US philosophers were key players in bringing Husserl to an English-speaking audience, whether we think of Cairns, Marvin Farber, or others. For more on this American story, see Livingston (forthcoming). For an account of Californian philosophy after World War 2, see J. McCumber (2016).
 - 5 The one passing reference to Husserl in Russell's autobiography is in a letter to Russell from Norbert Weiner in 1913, which refers dismissively to Husserl's "intellectual contortions" in a way that may possibly echo previous conversations between them on the subject; the letter is presented without comment, which itself is rather difficult to interpret as an act on Russell's part. At this time Russell was contemplating a visit to Gottingen in 1914, and it is difficult to imagine that he would have done so without at least some evaluation of Husserl's work.
 - 6 Nikolay Milkov suggests that a chain of influence on this point from Husserl, through Messer and Moore (as evidenced in the review for *Mind*), to Russell, can be traced (Milkov 2004).
 - 7 See SPEP's website: www.spep.org/about/history/SPEP.
 - 8 In 1930 Wittgenstein had remarked, "You could say of my work that it is 'phenomenology'" (1984, 116). He returns to consider phenomenology at the end of his career in *Remarks on Colour*: "There is no such thing as phenomenology, but there are indeed phenomenological problems" (RC, I, §53); "the temptation to believe in a phenomenology, something midway between science and logic, is very great" (RC, II, §3). Thanks to Aaron Harrison for drawing our attention to these remarks.
 - 9 At a SPEP conference in 1975, Mohanty responds to Sellars, noting that he also sees no unbridgeable gulf between phenomenological analysis and conceptual analysis. Mohanty also attributes to Sellars' great skill in practicing a phenomenological reduction by "thinning out" perceptual commitments (Mohanty 1978, 186); Sellars' myth of Jones, in recovering impression language from a kind of theoretical term, is a well-known example.
 - 10 And much of what has been written wrongly downplays Ryle's connection with phenomenology. As Thomasson points out, Dummett dismisses the connection between Ryle and phenomenology, suggesting that it is "a great pity" that "as far as I can see, little that he learned from them survived into his later work" (Dummett 1993, ix–x). Urmson also describes Ryle as having a "short and early flirtation with phenomenology" (Urmson 1967, 269).
 - 11 Ryle did not respond to Merleau-Ponty, when asked if their views had much in common, "I certainly hope not," as reported by Beck. He gave this answer in response to a question concerning to what extent his view was in line with the program outlined by Russell and developed by Wittgenstein (cf. Glendinning 2007, 73; Overgaard 2010; Vrahimis 2013).

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5

SOME MAIN PROBLEMS OF MOORE INTERPRETATION¹

Consuelo Preti

Introduction

Interpreting a philosophical view, tradition, or set of arguments raises questions about the assessment of those views in their own historical context. Is the value of a philosophical view only its contribution to problems that *we* want solved? Or is there value to a contextual study of what a thinker thought and why? Can a historical account, for instance, reveal ways in which a tradition or a view has become entangled in interpretations that need some clarification?² These questions and others like them are rapidly drawing interest in the history of analytic philosophy. Until fairly recently, the practice of analytic philosophy did not readily embrace accounts of its own history,³ even squaring off antagonistically with history of philosophy.⁴ Glock (2008, 868) has classified the standoff between analytic philosophy and the history of analytic philosophy as ranging from ignoring or despising the past (what he calls “historiophobia”) to reading features of the present into the past and distorting it (“anachronism”).⁵ The issue here is sometimes formulated as that between doing “genuine” philosophy (critical analysis and evaluation) and mere or “slavish” exposition.⁶ But we should note that even this distinction is a function of interpretation: in particular, a common interpretation of analytic philosophy, at least by its own lights.

This interpretation stresses a characterization of analytic philosophy as a genuinely critical and productive methodology for identifying, evaluating, and solving philosophical problems—with other approaches dismissed as “not philosophy.”⁷ The approach began in new discoveries in formal logic and their subsequent application, which elevated formal methods to the practice of philosophy in the early and mid part of the 20th century.⁸ The method—based on logic, analysis, and conceptual clarification—was widely regarded as having effected a sweeping

change in the very practice of philosophy, distinguishing it from science on the one hand and from nonsense on the other (Ayer, 1936).⁹ A central thesis of this new approach was that accounting for meaning or truth—hallmarks of philosophical endeavor—was not possible without some method of analysis. And no philosopher in the analytic tradition stands more for “analysis” than does G. E. Moore (1873–1958).¹⁰ In this paper I will critically examine some of the cornerstones of Moore’s work and their role in traditional interpretations of the nature of analytic philosophy.

Moore’s standing for well over a century now has been as one of the three founding fathers of analytic philosophy, alongside Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951).¹¹ The role of these figures in the inception of what became known as analytic philosophy was cemented in their early work, heralded as the founding basis of this new approach to philosophy.¹² As noted above, a key idea was that only through some kind of analysis—of our expressions, concepts, meanings, or something else—could we hope to discover their correct meaning; or (more abstractly) whether they could mean anything in the first place. Russellian and Wittgensteinian approaches in the first few decades of the 20th century took the view that the *grammatical* form of our expressions was misleading as to their *logical* form, and were focused on developing a formal apparatus to reveal that correct form.¹³ Moore approached the same idea by instead minutely analyzing the content of natural language expressions like “good.”¹⁴ In paper after paper Moore’s method was a painstaking exploration of a given concept (and its entailments), often initiated in some form of the question, “But what does *p* mean?” In what follows I will look more closely at the some of the central features of Moore’s views to suggest where the standard readings veer toward historical distortion or misunderstanding (or both). Along the way I will propose some adjustments in order to reflect a more contextually faithful understanding of Moore’s philosophy and its place in the shaping of the nature of analytic philosophy.

The Interpretation of Moore’s Philosophy: The Usual Suspects

There are four main elements to the established picture of Moore’s philosophy and his philosophical method and one principal theme that links them. First, the main elements: (1) that as a young student of philosophy, he embraced the Bradleyan idealist metaphysics then dominant in British philosophy, rebelled against it, and transformed philosophical method for good; (2) that having devoted his early philosophy to metaphysics and ethics, he shifted his philosophical interests to epistemology (but with little success); (3) that his style of philosophy introduced a notion of “analysis” to philosophical method that became the very essence of 20th-century analytic philosophy; (4) that he introduced and was an epitome of “commonsense” method in philosophy, particularly with regard to epistemological issues like skepticism and the nature of sense-data.

What links these elements in the interpretation of Moore's philosophy is the view that his main claim to fame, in many ways, *is* his philosophical method of analysis and common sense. What I want to propose instead is that accounts of Moore's philosophical "method" have overshadowed what his method was *for*. One deeply entrenched tradition-shaping interpretation of analytic philosophy is that the analytic approach was directed onto language and meaning. I want to make the case here that an ambiguity with respect to the notion of "meaning" led to this interpretation, which we can examine more closely through a contextual look at Moore's philosophical views. In brief: I want to argue that Moore's signature methods never were concerned with language in itself nor with linguistic meaning (depending on how we formulate that notion). Rather, Moore's method and views consistently displayed a deep-rooted interest in coming to grips with what we would call the *metaphysics* of meaning.¹⁵ I will begin with brief comments on (1) and (2);¹⁶ and go on to discuss (3) and (4) in more detail.

Moore and the "Revolt" from Idealism

One thing to square away is that the traditional picture of Moore's philosophical evolution is mostly due to Russell.¹⁷ Moore and Russell were students at Cambridge together in the mid-1890s; according to the Russellean version, their undergraduate exposure to philosophy was characterized by the Absolute Idealism dominant in British philosophy of the late 19th century, mostly through the work of F. H. Bradley. But (seemingly out of nowhere) Moore published a radically new account of the nature of judgment ("The Nature of Judgement", 1899; hereafter NJ) that resolutely spurned Bradleyan metaphysics and its monism, with its denial of definitive truth-value for our judgments; its insistence on the incoherence and illusion of "appearances" or ordinary experience; and the mentalism ingrained in its account of reality as "intelligible." In NJ, Moore argued that the object of thought was to be conceived as a mind- and language-independent entity, a proposition, composed of concepts related to one another. Thus, what we meant, what we thought, what we said, and what was true was conceived of as having the same nature as a mind- and language-independent reality, combining and recombining in necessary relations to one another. This "atomic realism," coupled with newly discovered formal techniques, was the beginning of what today we call "analytic philosophy."

When it came to Moore's influence on him, Russell did not mince words. The preface to Russell's 1903 *Principles of Mathematics* (PoM), for instance, contains a long acknowledgment to Moore:

On fundamental questions of philosophy, my position, in all its chief features, is derived from Mr G.E. Moore. I have accepted from him the non-existential nature of propositions (except such as happen to assert existence) and their independence of any knowing mind; also the pluralism which

regards the world, both that of existents and that of entities, as composed of an infinite number of mutually independent entities, with relations which are ultimate, and not reducible to adjectives of their terms of the whole which these compose. Before learning these views from him, I found myself completely unable to construct any philosophy of arithmetic, whereas their acceptance brought about an immediate liberation from a large number of difficulties which I believe to be otherwise insuperable. The doctrines just mentioned are, in my opinion, quite indispensable to any even tolerably satisfactory philosophy of mathematics, as I hope the following pages will show.

Effusive stuff; moreover, Russell never understated his conviction that Moore's philosophical insights of this period (1897–9) were vital not just to his own views but in effect spared British philosophy in general from further asphyxiation from the institutionally and intellectually then-prevalent neo-Hegelian metaphysics. Throughout his life Russell gave Moore lavish credit for having put an end to that metaphysical idealism, characterizing it as a “revolt” and “rebellion” by Moore (with Russell following closely after) to the bracing lucidity of logical realism.

A close look at the context in which Moore and Russell developed their early views, however, reveals that this picture is somewhat misrepresentative.¹⁸ Examination of documents that survive from this period, for instance, show that in Moore's early philosophical forays the influence of Bradley was counterweighted by a new scientific objective conception of psychology (“mental science”) that was also prevalent at Cambridge philosophy during this time. The fundamental notion in the mental science of the day was that psychological states could have non-psychological objects. That is, the metaphysics of content (as we would say today) was more realist in the psychology of the late 19th century than were the accounts of states like judgment and thought in the work of Bradley and Hegel. Moore's insights did not come out of nowhere, it turns out, but right out of his philosophical *milieu* at Cambridge. Moreover, Bradleyan metaphysics was not as dominant in Cambridge as it may have seemed, and British idealism did not wither away as quickly as Russell (and a common interpretation of the inception of analytic philosophy itself) tells it.¹⁹ To call Moore's view a “revolt” or a “rebellion” somewhat mischaracterizes how Moore's logical realism developed in its own context. Moreover, it supported the historical distortion, at the foundation of analytic philosophy, of radically differentiating so-called analytic philosophy from continental philosophy.²⁰ The consequences of the new view for 20th-century philosophy, however, could not have been predicted (even by Russell).

From Metaphysics and Ethics to Epistemology

Another standard interpretation of Moore is that he started off as an ethicist, even a metaphysician of ethics,²¹ but that after 1903, his concerns became mainly epistemological.²² Thus Braithwaite for instance (1961, 27) captures the general

sense of Moore's philosophical reputation when he notes that "The main feature in the public image of Moore is his appeal to 'common sense' in his refutation of what Hume called 'excessive scepticism.'" These concerns are thought to come to a head in his 1939 "Proof of An External World" (PEW). The main line of argument in PEW concerns our understanding of the notions of *things outside of us* as well as of the *external world*. Moore asks: if our aim is to prove "the existence of things outside of us" what is it that we are aiming to prove? What is the "point in question?"

In the interpretive literature on PEW, however, approaches to it are split between what are known as epistemological and metaphysical readings.²³ The metaphysical readings of PEW mostly take it that whatever metaphysical conclusions Moore was interested in establishing concerning the nature of the external world, he fails—and fails miserably.²⁴ The epistemological interpretations of PEW in the literature, on the other hand, take its central critical target to be a skeptic who denies our knowing that there is an external world, and that Moore's main interest in this paper is in exploring notions like knowledge, certainty, and proof.

One point that cuts against this interpretation—and the related interpretation of the (alleged) shift in Moore's philosophical views—is that Moore *himself* explicitly rejected an epistemological reading of PEW not long after it was published (1942, 668–72). Moreover, although his own replies to critics of PEW concede that the arguments in PEW do not succeed against skepticism, it is significant that he does not disavow them (1942). This suggests that the usual interpretation of PEW as purely "epistemological" is missing something. As it turns out, a closer look at the Moore's extensive draft revisions of PEW, many of which survive, show him struggling less with the problem of "things external to us" rather than the issue with "things external to our minds."²⁵ What the PEW drafts show is that Moore's main concern in PEW was getting clear on the notion of "things outside of us," and that what he aimed for in his account was to capture what philosophers have been interested in when addressing this and related questions. Thus Moore appears to be arguing, in his characteristic manner (about which more below), that there is a *logical* distinction between the notion of a thing to be met with in space and a thing that is presented to the experiencing subject as in space, and that this distinction can support a distinction between things that are mind-dependent ("in the mind") and those that are mind-independent ("outside of us"). What this suggests is that Moore's concerns as formulated in PEW are on a continuum in the development of his thinking across his career, with important links to even his earliest work. If this is right, there is a case to be made that the right way to interpret his body of work—if PEW is any example—is as an extension of his arguments first developed in 1897 against metaphysical idealism, rather than as a wholesale (and mostly futile) shift to purely epistemological issues. I will draw out this line of thought below with a look at two canonical Moorean methodological concepts: analysis and common sense.

Analysis

Considering that Moore's reputation is that of the supreme analyst of analytic philosophy, it may come as a surprise that there are conflicting formulations of what he may have meant by "analysis" and conflicting examples of the sort of thing referred to by "analysis" in his work.²⁶ Moore isn't terribly helpful himself, giving a series of equivocal remarks on "analysis" (1942) that fail to settle the question.²⁷ There is also the related issue of the paradox of analysis. What is to be analyzed is known as the *analysandum* (G); what does the analysis is the *analysans* (F). So what is the status of "F is G"? If it is an identity statement then it would seem that "F" and "G" have to have the same meaning (the statement is an analytic identity). But if so, then the "analysis" is trivial. But if they do not, then the statement "F is G" is false; so the analysis is not correct or is not a success. The problem is to formulate an analysis that is both correct *and* not trivial.²⁸ Moore formulates one version of the paradox in PE; and there are a variety of interpretations of what it amounts to. In addition, there are by now many accounts of a puzzle that Wittgenstein christened "Moore's paradox"; though Moore's paradox is not a paradox of analysis.²⁹

The growing role of formal methods in analytic philosophy meant that "analysis" was often construed as "logical analysis," especially early on. A paradigm case of logical analysis is Russell's theory of descriptions (1905). On Russell's account, the logical form of "The present King of France is bald" is that of an existentially quantified sentence.³⁰ That is: the surface grammatical form of that sentence is misleading. The definite description in the subject place of the sentence, grammatically speaking, is not a *logical* subject (a singular term).

Another conception of analysis is connected more closely to Moore's work, however. This has to do with the (presumed) connection between "analysis" and the ordinary language philosophy characteristic of Oxford-based philosophers in the period after World War II, where the primary focus of attention is expressions of natural language in their ordinary use.³¹ This approach in turn evolved into the notion that analytic philosophy involved something like the analysis of language or linguistic meaning. This tradition in analytic philosophy is most often taken to encompass Moore's methodology, given its emphasis on "analysis" and "common sense." From the historical point of view, however, the meaning of "meaning" in this context is significant. Let us look at this more closely.

Moore's most detailed reply concerning what he meant by "analysis" came in (1942, 660–xx) in his reply to Langford (1942, 323f), who lodged the complaint that Moore had not been sufficiently explicit on his own position on the nature of analysis. Moore proposes a formulation or a set of conditions. The first is that he conceives of analysis as being directed onto "an idea, or concept or proposition," and not a verbal expression (word or sentence). The next is that (merely) claiming that two verbal expressions have the same meaning is not an analysis. The third is more complex: that there are (at least) three necessary conditions to what Moore

conceives of as an analysis proper of a concept. These are that (i) a concept *C* can only be analyzed by another concept *C*★ iff there is no way to attribute *C* to an object without also attributing *C*★; (ii) that there is no way to verify that *C* can be attributed to an object without attributing that *C*★ can be attributed to that object; (iii) *C* and *C*★ are synonyms. Moore takes these conditions as necessary, but not as sufficient, for the analysis of a concept.

I would argue, however, that what we see Moore as particularly stressing in his reply to Langford is that “analysis” is not a linguistic endeavor—it is a metaphysically oriented one, where the role of analysis is to clarify what it is for something to be what it is. We see this direction of thought in Moore’s earliest philosophical efforts, and (as I argued above) in his later work. In NJ (1899), where Moore argues that a judgment is composed of non-psychologically construed (objective) concepts bearing necessary relations to one another, the interpretive issue is what is meant by “concept.” Roughly speaking: on the one hand, there is an inevitable mental component to our use of language; our formulation of “meaning”; and our understanding of “thought.” On the other, there is the problem of accounting for what it is that our thoughts and words are *about*. Thus our construal of notions like “language,” “meaning,” “concept,” and “thought” will need to contend with what is known as an act/object distinction.³² When we think, we are certainly performing a mental act; but what we are thinking *about* need not be mental in itself. Moore was clear in NJ that he did not mean anything mentalistic or psychological by “concept,” or by “judgment”; for Moore, the objects of ethical judgment in particular would require a non-mental, non-psychologicistic formulation for their normative properties to make any sense. So I would argue that the right way to interpret Moore’s “analytical” method is to understand that putative objectivity of objects of thought (or will) was never abandoned in Moore’s thinking. Moore took analysis to be, ultimately, a determination or even individuation of the properties we attribute to the analysandum in question—a consideration, that is, of what makes the analysandum *what it is* in itself. That an analysis tends to be expressed in words was something that Moore himself noted (664) but that he took to be more or less irrelevant to the process of *genuine* analysis.

A Defence of Common Sense

An examination of Moore’s 1925 paper “A Defence of Common Sense” (DCS) can make this line of thought clearer. DCS stands out as a cross-section of some of the key tradition-shaping construals of analytic philosophy linked to Moore and his method.³³ In explaining what he takes his philosophical views (and method) to be, Moore assembles nearly all of the elements that have come to represent a view about analytic philosophy itself: analysis, ordinary language, and common sense. I want to show that the right reading of Moore’s claims in DCS highlights many of the ways in which Moore’s views have played a role in

shaping a common view of analytic philosophy, and I will conclude this paper by proposing a few adjustments to the usual interpretation.

Moore's paper sets out three main points that he takes as representative of the way his thinking differs from that of some other philosophers. The first point (I) is a compound of a list of what he calls "truisms" and a meta-claim that "each of us has known to be true a proposition that corresponds to the propositions listed" (Baldwin 1993, 106). The list of truisms comprise statements concerning the existence of one's own body, that it has changed over time, that it occupies space and bears spatial relations to other bodies; and that one has had different mental states of different kinds like perceptions and beliefs, thoughts of imaginary things, dreams, and feelings. The second point (II) is that there is no good reason to suppose either that (i) physical facts are logically dependent on mental facts or (ii) that they are causally dependent on mental facts. And the third point (III) is that while he not skeptical as to the truth of any of these propositions, he is skeptical as to their correct analysis.

What Moore goes on to claim about (I) is that the principal way in which he differs from some philosophers is that they:

seem to have thought it legitimate to use the word "true" in such a sense that a proposition which is partially false may nevertheless also be true; and some of these, therefore, would perhaps say that propositions like those enumerated in (1) are, in their view, true, when all the time they believe that every such proposition is partially false. I wish, therefore, to make it quite plain that I am not using "true" in any such sense I am maintaining, in short, that all the propositions in (1), and also many propositions corresponding to each of these, are *wholly* true

(Baldwin 1993, 110)

The same holds for the propositions that make up (II). And (III), though it takes a slightly different angle from (I) and (II), is no less an opportunity for Moore to set out what distinguishes his views from others'. This is, I would argue, Moore's stress on an objective conception of truth and of reality. Bradley is clearly the object of his claims in (I), as Bradley took the view that no proposition could be wholly true, since it could express only a partial and contradictory aspect of the Absolute.³⁴ Berkeley's subjective idealism ("esse is percipi") is explicitly the object of Moore's claims in (II). And as for (III)—and in general, as it turns out—Moore is clear that there is a distinction between a proposition's *being true* and our being able to supply an analysis of *what it would be for it to be true*.

Moore explains this by claiming that propositions of the types in (I) and (II) can only be analyzed in terms of increasingly simpler propositions. The simplest, ultimately, would be propositions like "I am perceiving *this*" and "*this* is a human hand." But note what Moore says is focus is here: "it is the analysis of

propositions of the latter kind which seems to me to present such great difficulties, while nevertheless the whole question as to the *nature* of material things obviously depends upon their analysis.” So we see him here explicitly tying the nature of analysis to *metaphysics*. He goes on:

It seems to me a surprising thing that so few philosophers, while saying a great deal as to what material things *are* and as to what it is to perceive them, have attempted to give a clear account as to what precisely they suppose themselves to *know* (or to *judge*, in case they have held that we don’t *know* any such propositions to be true, or even that no such propositions *are* true) when they know or judge such things as “This is a hand,” “That is the sun,” “This is a dog,” etc. etc. etc.

(Baldwin 1993, 128)

Moore here clearly places emphasis on the job of analysis to provide conditions for what it is for something to be what it is. This, of course, will be inevitably eventually linked to our states of judgment and knowledge. But Moore’s essential claim here is that it is reckless (at best) to suppose that we can take ourselves to judge—let alone know—the truth of a proposition without an account of what it *is* that we take ourselves to judge or to know. Epistemological claims, that is, only make sense once we’ve sorted out the metaphysics of the objects of thought.

Moore approaches the formulation of “common sense” itself from a few different perspectives to tie in with his project in DCS. One is that “a commonsense view of the world is wholly true.” Any feature of the world as specified in a commonsense view of that world is, moreover, true of that world, whether we know it or not. In addition, as Moore formulates it, the commonsense view of the world is expressed in propositions that are “ordinary” propositions and that mean “precisely what every reader, in reading them, will have understood me to mean” (Baldwin 1993, 110). Moore explicitly distinguishes his position here from that of philosophers who make a pretense of claiming or believing truisms like the ones he lists in (I), only to go on to contradict or dispute them. What lies behind this pretense, according to Moore, is that such philosophers would also dispute that there is an ordinary or “popular” meaning that such propositions possess (Baldwin 1993, 111). Moore in fact mocks such philosophers for being unwilling to give a “plain” answer to such plain questions while opting to create willful ambiguities (111). Moore asserts instead that there is no ambiguity to the meaning of (for instance) “The earth has existed for many years past.” We plainly understand the proposition expressed by this sentence. Anyone who denies this, he argues, is conflating the question of “understanding the meaning of *p*” with being able to give a correct analysis of its meaning (“know what it means”) (Baldwin 1993, 127). After all, in order to analyze it, we have to understand what it is that we want to analyze; although, as we have seen above, this is something

Moore takes to be “profoundly difficult” and even something that is it possible no one could provide.

What makes DCS practically a catalogue of key tradition-shaping elements in analytic philosophy from a Moorean perspective is of course his use of the notions of “analysis,” “common sense,” and “ordinary or popular meaning” in the explanation of how his views differ from those of other philosophers. But I think we can say that a kind of non-Moorean carelessness with regard to these notions developed, over time, into an understanding of analytic philosophy as a project of “analyzing” ordinary language; or (some understanding of) common-sense *meaning*. In DCS, however, Moore is quite clear that *bad* philosophy begins with denying such basic truths as the existence of material objects; the existence of my own and others’ minds; and (I think most crucially) that what we think, judge, believe, and know are not mental entities. When Moore addresses the philosophers who have purported to deny his (I) and (II) he is addressing idealists—not for the first time, after all—as examples of bad philosophers: Bradley, who rejected any truth we possess as mere appearance and thus not wholly true; and Berkeley, who rejected material reality as absurd.³⁵ Moore is quite clear about this even in his remarks on sense-data, where he claims that though what we are immediately acquainted with is a sense-datum, sense-data are not the objects themselves that we do perceive and know. What I would argue this suggests is that the overarching position that Moore is emphasizing in DCS is in fact what we would call commonsense *realism*, which characterises his earliest views on the nature of judgment and the Good, all the way through to his later views on the nature of an external world.

We suggested above that a longstanding antipathy between analytic philosophy and examinations of its own history was instrumental in shaping interpretations of analytic philosophy. Some of that antipathy, I hope to have shown here, has been reflected in the understanding and interpretation of Moore’s views. The usual understanding of Moore’s views and philosophical method, I believe, has mischaracterised them, owing (in part) to a variety of equivocal conceptions of meaning, reference, and language that held sway in the analytic philosophy literature up to the latter part of the 20th century.³⁶ One of the greatest successes of late-20th-century analytic philosophy, however, was the amount of attention that began to be paid to these notions, starting with criticisms of Frege and Russell in the work of (for instance) Putnam (1975) and Kripke (1980).³⁷ As a result, we have some critical distance now; and with it the opportunity to dis-entrench the usual interpretations of Moore’s views and his method as (for instance) as concerning linguistic meaning and ordinary uses of language. A few welcome consequences, both historical and philosophical, could come of recalibrating Moore’s views. Such readings would impart improved coherence to his philosophical development; address an important historical question as what he took himself to be arguing for by his own lights; and would ultimately provide a more faithful assessment of Moore’s views as well as their role in the interpretation of analytic philosophy.

Notes

- 1 My thanks to Gary Ostertag for discussion; and for the title.
- 2 Russell (1900) is a classic explicit example. See Ayers, Ree, and Westoby (1978) and Hunter (1993) for discussion. See also Strawson (1966) and Rorty (1984).
- 3 There is a very large literature on this; I can only gesture toward it here. Useful introductions into its central debates are Ayers (1978); Glock (2008); and the collection of papers in Sorrell and Rogers (2005), which includes Hatfield (2005). In the more recent literature, Beaney (2013) is a thorough and detailed source. Kremer (2013) discusses the merits of what he calls “philosophical history” in detail; Floyd (2009) identifies positive scholarly trends in the history of analytic philosophy since the 1980s.
- 4 See Sorrell and Rogers (2005, 43–4) on the story of the sign on Gilbert Harman’s Princeton office door: “History of Philosophy: Just Say No!” This literature invariably contains references (most at second or third hand) to the quip attributed to Quine that there are two kinds of people interested in philosophy— those interested in philosophy and those interested in the history of philosophy (Rorty 1984). More recently, however, this debate flared up again with the publication and subsequent critical reviews and discussion of Soames (2003–05, 2 vols). *Philosophical Studies* (2006, 129(3): 605–65) includes a set of criticisms of Soames’ work and his replies. See also the papers featured in the Author (Soames) Meets Critics session at the Pacific Division Meetings of APA, March 25, 2006. Front and center in these sets of papers is the question of the value of historical or contextual work in analytic philosophy.
- 5 See Kremer (2013) for more detailed discussion and criticism, particularly on the related issue of “presentism”; what Kuklick (2006, 551–2), in his review of Soames (2003–05), called “the enormous condescension of the present.”
- 6 See Pigden (1999, 24) on what is sometimes referred to as ‘text-fondling.’
- 7 No characterization of analytic philosophy is without minefields. See Beaney (2013) for recent and thorough discussion. See Rorty (1984) for a capsule summary of the sort of view mentioned here.
- 8 Another vast literature; the key figures and texts are Frege (1884; 1893) and Russell (1903; 1905). The central idea is that revealing logical form is the only way to understand the meaning of our expressions; surface form is deceptive.
- 9 See Floyd (2009) on the role of formal methods in the interpretation of analytic philosophy.
- 10 See Urmson (1956); Langford (in Schilpp 1942).
- 11 *Anglophone* analytic philosophy, that is. Dummett’s position (1993, 1), that the origin of analytic philosophy was a Germanophone phenomenon, is not entirely misconceived. Dummett was wrong, however, when he claimed that Russell and Moore sprang from “an entirely different *milieu*.” See Preti (2008a); Baldwin and Preti (2011); Preti (forthcoming).
- 12 Moore’s *Principia Ethica* (1903a), Russell’s *Principles of Mathematics* (1903), and Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922).
- 13 See Dummett (1975). The question “what is logical form” itself arises as a characteristic question of this interpretation of analytic philosophy. See the literature cited in Pietroski, P., <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/logical-form/>.
- 14 Russell’s *Theory of Descriptions* (1903; 1905) is the *locus classicus* for this conception of analysis; an apex is Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* (1922). Russell develops it further in *Theory of Knowledge* (1913), *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914), and *Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (1918); all in *Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vols 7 and 8. See also Urmson (1956).
- 15 See Makin (2002) for a useful and thorough discussion.
- 16 These are discussed more fully in Preti (2008b); Baldwin and Preti (2011); Preti (forthcoming); and Morris and Preti (2015).

- 17 See Russell (1944, 1–20; 1959a, 54–64; 1959b). There is a certain amount of distortion, however, in what Russell and (even) Moore themselves say about their early philosophical development. See Griffin (1991; 1992); Hylton (1990); Preti (2008a; 2008b; forthcoming).
- 18 Both Moore and Russell studied philosophy with two notable mental scientists of the day at Cambridge: G. F. Stout and James Ward.
- 19 Ewing, 1934.
- 20 That is: the new psychology was developed in Germany and Austria, in the thinking of continental philosopher-psychologists like Herbart, Lotze, Brentano, and Twardowski. See Van der Schaar (2013); Nasim (2008); Preti (forthcoming).
- 21 Moore's PE was a version of his 1897/1898 Trinity Fellowship dissertations, both titled *The Metaphysical Basis of Ethics*. See Baldwin and Preti (2011).
- 22 See most recently: Coliva (2004; 2010); Lycan (2001); Neta (2007); Pryor (2000, 2004), Soames (2003); Sosa (1999); Stroud (1984); Wright (2002). Past commentary includes Ambrose (1942); Malcolm (1942); Warnock (1958); and Wittgenstein (1969).
- 23 See Morris and Preti (forthcoming).
- 24 See Klemke (2000, 31); O'Connor (1982, 34); and Baldwin (1990, 295).
- 25 These are held in the Cambridge University Library (Add. 8875 15/3/1–6). Moore was given to multiple redraftings—so much so that some interesting material, like a draft review of Russell's *Principles of Mathematics*, remained unpublished. In the case of PEW we do not see what he was rejecting in his surviving materials, but what he was trying to clarify in the final published version.
- 26 See Schilpp (1942), especially the contributions of Langford (319–42) and Malcolm (343–68). But see White (1958) for criticism of the tendency to conflate Moore's appeal to common sense with ordinary language.
- 27 That Moore was not afraid to allow ambiguities to play out, however, is perhaps an important overlooked aspect of his method: that it be in service to what philosophy should be: it should be the right kind of “nonsense” (1942, 21); and it should avoid “woolliness” (1942, 19). For this, an issue might need to be conspicuously difficult to settle.
- 28 Semantic issues surrounding the question of identity statements between names became very significant in late-20th-century philosophy of language and mind. See Kripke (1980). See also Beaney (2007; 2016): <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/analysis/>.
- 29 See Wittgenstein (1953, Part II, sec. x). The issue is as follows: It can be raining, and I don't have to believe it. But to say “It is raining, but I don't believe it is” is odd at best (maybe paradoxical), since the sentences are not contradictions, and are not inconsistent. The issue highlights puzzles of self-ascription of belief, assertion, and entailment. See Wittgenstein (1953, Part II, sec. x); Baldwin (1990, 226); and Green and Williams (2007).
- 30 That is: there is one and only one x such that x is present King of France, and x is bald. The sentence is false (no x satisfies those properties).
- 31 See Ambrose and Lazerowitz (1970) and Ryle et al. (1957, 1–11). The early stage of this approach is often attributed to Wittgenstein's work after 1929. The post-war Oxford tributary is represented in the work of Austin, Ryle, and Strawson (among others).
- 32 See Preti (2008a).
- 33 DCS was Moore's response to an invitation to “give the contributors an opportunity of stating authentically what they regard as the main problem of philosophy and what they have endeavored to make central in their own speculation upon it” (Moore, 1925).
- 34 Bradley (1883; 1893).
- 35 See Moore (1899; 1903b).

- 36 See Dummett (1975) for a conception of the primacy of philosophy of language that held fast for some time.
- 37 See Soames (2003; 2005).

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6

RUSSELL'S PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD

How Analytic Philosophy is Shaped By and Perpetuates Its Misinterpretation

Rosalind Carey

Introduction

By a kind of generous anachronism it has become common to refer to a certain period of thought existing prior to analytic philosophy as “early analytic philosophy” and to regard Russell as one of its representatives. This way of thinking has some justification, but it carries risks. What we think analytic philosophers do, and care about, may create certain expectations that influence our interpretation of Russell. Reading these expectations into his work may then appear to confirm what we think about analytic philosophy. Ironically, similar expectations seem likely to have led to the interpretations of Russell’s work that shaped the analytic tradition. Given Russell’s enormous output and the many expressions that he uses with counterintuitive meanings it is easy now and was easy then to fulfill expectations we may bring to our reading of his works. This essay examines two kinds of expectations derived from analytic philosophy that may influence how we interpret Russell and, in turn, reinforce conceptions of analytic philosophy.

First, analytic philosophers are frequently described as approaching philosophical problems “piecemeal” and seeing progress in terms of narrow, well-defined philosophical problems that “need not be tied to any overarching philosophical view” (Soames 2003, xv). If, knowing this, we expect an overarching philosophical theory to be an option or secondary to the business of analysis, Russell’s work cannot be understood. For Russell, to proceed “piecemeal” is to work *within* and successively refine an overarching philosophical view: a philosophy is first assumed and then analysis is used to refine it. Doctrines that result from analysis are folded back into the philosophy, where they reshape it and add detail. What is “piecemeal” is the progress of the total body of theory. If we expect a philosophical theory to come after the work of analysis, Russell’s procedure may be

misunderstood. Russell's overarching theory is not a "top down" deductive system, with pre-packaged answers to all problems, but it does not merely arise from analysis: it both precedes analysis and is built up by it.¹

Second, it is not uncommon for people to say that analytic philosophers generally aim "at truth and knowledge, as opposed to moral or spiritual improvement" (Soames 2003, xiv), but what kind of knowledge? It is not highly uncertain knowledge that they are thought to value, but definite results such as the theory of descriptions. A reader who is influenced by these views may read Russell's references to definite results as a kind of confirmation of the analytic philosopher's view. But, for Russell, definite results are not philosophy and philosophy is not definite knowledge. The knowledge that Russell attributes to philosophy consists of highly uncertain explanatory theories of the world. Since an "imaginative picture" of the world is not something that counts as definite knowledge, it may seem suspect. But, Russell asks, should a disinterested philosopher demand that knowledge resulting from inquiry conform to his sense that definite knowledge is good? For even our sense of what *is* good may shift as a result of inquiry.

The following pages discuss these issues, starting in section 1 with the emergence of the philosophy that Russell says can evolve, turning in section 2 to how that philosophy evolves by analyses that result in hypotheses, and ending in section 3 with his conception of the nature and value of the philosophical knowledge that results.

1a Analytic Realism (Logical Atomism): A Revolution

In the past, a philosophy was conventionally expected to attempt to offer a perfect vision of reality. Russell had to fight against this convention even to arrive at the idea that, like science, philosophy can be the best picture we have at the moment and can progressively improve. Russell adopts this view of philosophical progress in 1899–1900 in conjunction with a particular philosophy, later called analytic realism or logical atomism (1959, 11), which then evolves together as one philosophical picture throughout his career.

This philosophy appears in two stages. The first stage concerns mathematical knowledge, and it ends in Russell adopting a philosophy that is realist (what is known is external to the knower), pluralist (there are many entities), and Platonist (concepts have being). These views begin to emerge in 1898 when Russell is a 26-year-old scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge. Having set himself the task of developing a comprehensive philosophy of the sciences from the perspective of British idealism, he has already written on the foundations of geometry (1897) and is turning to the concepts and judgments on which all of mathematics is founded. Meanwhile, his friend G. E. Moore has become critical of Kant's idealism and the idealism fashionable in Great Britain at the time. By the summer of 1898 Russell has begun to think, contrary to the views of these idealist philosophies,

that a mathematical proposition is necessarily true not because of how the mind is constructed to think, but because there are connections among concepts like *two* and *four* that obtain regardless of our ways of knowing and regardless of how many things exist. Moore has shown him how such a position could be maintained.²

Briefly, the position is as follows: in a true proposition, what we talk about—the subject of the proposition—cannot be merely an idea; whether or not it actually exists, it must have *being* (1900b, 229). Their new realism requires this for truth. Russell says in 1898: “Being, then, belongs to whatever may be the subject in true judgments” (1898, 168). Since a concept may be the subject of a proposition, as in “red is a color”, concepts must have being. But since it makes no sense to say that an entity sometimes has being but at other times does not, a concept is thought to have being when it occurs as a subject and also when it is asserted to be the property of some other thing or concept. It then follows that the simplest assertion of a subject and predicate (e.g. “this page is white”) concerns two entities. It then also follows that the connections among entities, such as those obtaining between *two* and *four*, are discovered in the sense that America was discovered: they are there, and then we find them.

What is critical to Russell's view that a philosophy can be revised and can evolve is his critique of deduction as a method of inquiry. This critique appears in the second stage alongside a doctrine of “external” relations. In the first stage Russell did not yet assume that the connections among entities, the relations, are as fundamental as he takes concepts to be. He assumed, along with contemporary idealists like F. H. Bradley, that relations are not entities. Russell changes his mind about relations through Moore's ongoing influence and by reading Leibniz. In 1898, as he studies Leibniz's private writings in preparation to teach a class the next year, Russell finds, to his astonishment, that Leibniz deduced his theories about monads from general assumptions, and, furthermore, that one assumption is that propositions are all of the subject-predicate form.

Reading Leibniz draws Russell's attention to the role this assumption plays in his own work. Little has changed in 1898, as Russell reads Leibniz: the subject-predicate logic or class logic is still virtually the whole of logic, and this logic continues to be codified as the general philosophical principle that propositions ultimately *must* be subject-predicate in form. Many philosophers thus infer from this general principle that propositions that are apparently relational must really attribute predicates to subjects. On Bradley's doctrine of “internal relations,” what is valid in a relation like “to the left of” is a property or pair of properties of the terms. On this view, a relational proposition like “A is to the left of B” is shorthand for “A has a property of *being to the left of B*” and “B has a property of *being to the right of A*”, both of which are subject-predicate propositions. Russell has assumed this doctrine unconsciously, not recognizing it, until now, as the source of repeated difficulties he has encountered in his study of mathematics, which he has dubbed the “contradiction of relativity” (1898, 166).³

Reading Leibniz also draws Russell's attention to issues of philosophical method. Russell sees that philosophers have not asked whether, in fact, all propositions are subject-predicate in form; they do not examine their assumptions. They hasten to draw conclusions about the world by reason alone, rather than suggest tentative hypotheses. Thus, the number of things in the world should be an empirical question, but, from their different ways of adhering to the subject-predicate assumption, both Leibniz and Bradley deduce answers to this question: Leibniz deduces a system of many monads, and Bradley, like Hegel, concludes that there is just one independent entity, the universe. Meanwhile, the study of geometry has gradually led Russell to be suspicious of attempts to draw conclusions about the actual world from reason alone. Pure geometry studies possible axiom systems, but it does not legislate the nature of actual space. This decision belongs to an empirical study of space. Having diagnosed the problem, Russell's corrective measures follow the model of geometry. In analogy with the work of a pure geometer, a philosopher ought to examine what propositional forms are possible. In analogy with empirical inquiries, the application of philosophy to the study of the world ought to proceed as science does, by providing tentative, approximate hypotheses.

The pure inquiry begins in January 1899 with a talk on "The Classification of Relations" (*Papers* 2, 138–46). In that talk, Russell argues that *predication* is a relation between two terms, and, against Bradley, that a reduction of this relation to subject-predicate propositions cannot be carried out. *Predication* is as real as the entities it relates but this relation does not belong to their nature, as properties have been thought to do. He then shows why other relations cannot be reduced to assertions of properties. Because these relations differ logically from *predication*, they require expression by different kinds of relational propositions. With the admission of relational propositional forms, the contradictions plaguing his explanations of mathematical propositions are removed (1899b, 90). They become the distorted result of an impoverished logical doctrine.

Russell's inquiry into relational forms has implications for the way philosophy is applied. So long as relations were grounded in properties and properties were assumed to belong to a thing's nature, it seemed possible to deduce a thing's relations to other things from its nature. This is not possible for Russell. His philosophy has become atomistic: relations have being, like concepts, but they do not alter the nature of their terms, which become independent "atoms." Philosophical investigation about the actual world must then be inductive, with the success of a philosophical analysis being judged by whether it resolves problems in an area of established knowledge without creating new ones. Since his assumptions remove certain apparent contradictions from mathematics, they can be trusted, at least for the present, and used.

1b The True Philosophic Method

The atomist philosophy just described then proceeds to evolve piecemeal throughout the rest of Russell's career. Before illustrating how his entire

philosophical theory, both method and substance, progresses “piecemeal,” another important use Russell makes of the term “piecemeal” should be mentioned briefly.

Russell sometimes uses expressions like “piecemeal” to describe an important implication of his atomistic philosophy, which assumes things, concepts, and relations of different kinds. Russell talks about addressing problems “singly,” “one by one,” or “piecemeal” to make the point that philosophical problems are logically independent of each other. These expressions are not meant to highlight the serial nature of the problem-solving process. Russell would not deny that problems are addressed serially, but there is no reason for him to affirm it either. (Could anyone proceed non-serially?) His point, in using these terms, is logical. Unlike idealism, no general principle provides a pre-packaged, single answer. For nothing about what there is can be deduced from the nature of knowledge, and many of a thing's relations to other things cannot be deduced from its properties. As noted in the last section, his atomist philosophy implies that philosophers proceed inductively; put another way, it requires philosophers to make independent investigations into problems rather than drawing sweeping conclusions. Similarly, the results of his inquiry into propositional forms—that there are different *possible* relational forms—means that questions that philosophers had previously decided *a priori* must now be answered by investigation.

This independence of problems first appears in Russell's writings when the 1899–1900 draft of *Principles of Mathematics* turns to mathematical primitives (1899b mss). Is *equality* a relation or a common property?, he asks. “Many philosophers,” Russell says, “would decide this question offhand, by means of a general principle. Whenever two terms have the same relation to a third term, they would say, this shows that the two terms have a common property.” Since Russell has adopted the view that there are multiple logical forms of propositions, so that the subject-predicate form is not the only one, he says: “this doctrine is rejected by the logic adopted in the present work,” but he notes that rejection of this principle “leaves the question [of the analysis of *equality*] open” (1899b, 58). Similarly, with respect to *between*, while some might say on general grounds that relations have only two terms, if the possibility of triadic relations is allowed, then whether *between* is a dyadic or triadic relation “must remain open” (1899b, 81). To solve one problem and leave others *open* is quite different from relying on principle and drawing a conclusion covering them all. That method tends to be dogmatic, whereas his method provides solutions that are tentative. With respect to his decision about *equality*, Russell admits at this time that he knows of no “conclusive argument” (1899b, 58).

This logical independence of philosophical problems is an important reason why his philosophy as a whole can evolve piecemeal, and by 1900 Russell has come to a philosophy and a view of inquiry that allows for this kind of progress. Russell's ambition continues to be, as it was when he was an idealist, to provide a unifying picture of sciences and knowledge, and he continues to see this picture

as resulting from a search for the fundamentals of a science or area of knowledge. But now a philosopher searches for hypotheses to explain some concept (number, matter, etc.) fundamental to the premises of a science *and* reviews his assumptions, which may be logical premises, such as the subject-predicate doctrine. The atomistic philosophy gives the particular terms (things and concepts; or, later, sense data and universals) employed *if* we take a concept or empirical premise and work backwards to simpler concepts or premises. The inquiry into forms, or “philosophical logic,” gives an inventory of possible relational structures.

An emphasis on examining premises of both kinds appears when Russell objects to Leibniz for “an emphasis on *results*, rather than premises, which is radically opposed to the true philosophic method” (1900a, 170). First, Leibniz fails to examine his logical-philosophical “axioms,” including the doctrine, inherited from Aristotle, that all propositions are of the subject-predicate form. He is in a hurry to deduce consequences. Russell is deeply critical of the tendency among philosophers to hasten towards deductive results, paying scant attention to the premises used. Indeed, he thinks that philosophical assumptions are sometimes so hidden that it is a surprise to discover that a philosophy actually proceeds from assumptions, rather than simply being a clever story. This is problematic. Philosophical theories cannot be judged against each other unless they at least share assumptions of method. If a philosophy does not accept a particular method of reasoning, we cannot criticize it for failing to reason that way. Until we can see what assumptions are being made, a rational consensus among philosophers remains out of reach (1906, 432).

Second, like Russell, Leibniz has the idea of analyzing the axioms of a science into “more simple ideas and truths, until we come to those that are primary” (cited in 1900a, 19), but, unlike Russell, he introduces as premises propositions on the order of “ $3 = 2 + 1$,” whose concepts are analyzed only in the sense of being defined by terms we already associate with them (e.g. “ $2 = 1 + 1$ ”). For Russell, analysis may introduce new elements, and what we think we know about the concept or belief analyzed may change as a result of the analysis. Because Leibniz does not examine his premises very deeply, he does not introduce the right sort or number of axioms for a science like mathematics. And because his premises are uninteresting, Leibniz focuses on what can be deduced from them rather than examining them. The results of a philosophical inquiry can be presented deductively, but this is the order of exposition, not inquiry, as it seems to be in Leibniz and other philosophers. The correct philosophical method points backwards, towards ultimate premises, not forwards, towards their consequences. For all of the above reasons, the true method of a philosopher, for Russell, is one in which the “results” of inquiry are *premises*, either of a science or of the philosopher asking questions about it.

The expression “true method of philosophy” does not mean that philosophy has a special method. With Moore’s help, Russell has argued that philosophy has *no* method of analysis other than the established one of the sciences. Like any

science of observation, philosophy involves “the registration of the ‘facts’ ... or empirical premises,” the “inductive discovery of hypotheses, or logical premises, to fit the facts,” and the “deduction of new propositions from the facts and hypotheses” (1907, 579–80). By *empirical premises* Russell means those beliefs of the subject being examined whose truth we assume (that $2 + 2 = 4$, that unsupported bodies fall, and so on). We assume these in order to analyze. And, since we assume them, they don’t need to be proved. The goal of analysis is then to invent hypotheses that can serve as premises for these beliefs and to show that the beliefs can be deduced from the new premises, which are then its *logical premises*. We require only “that observed facts should follow” from the results of our analysis, and, “if possible, from no set of premises not equivalent to those which we assume” (1903, 442).

2a The Residue of Analysis: “It Seems an Unavoidable Inference”

Russell’s idea that a philosophy can evolve had to fight the convention that a philosophy claims to be complete and perfect. Perhaps because of this lingering convention, he was often misunderstood. Instead of attributing to Russell an attempt to give a theory that, over time, approximates more and more closely to reality, he has been described as, and ridiculed for, producing a series of different philosophies.⁴ Yet Russell spent much of his life expanding and refining his philosophy in an attempt to provide a better theory.

Good examples of this process can be found in chapters of his 1913 manuscript *Theory of Knowledge*. Russell’s ambition, in philosophy, is to give a unified account of the sciences and their connection with sensation. The study of knowledge is therefore part of a larger plan to analyze the concepts of mind, matter, space, time, cause, and so on. The 1913 text focuses on epistemological data, that is, beliefs like “I heard a sound.” In general, to explain a belief, or a concept, Russell infers some kind of relation among entities. He draws the forms of relations (dual, triadic, etc.) from those his inquiry has shown to be possible and the entities (sense data, universals) from his general philosophy. Besides illustrating this general practice, the 1913 text shows that Russell revises earlier doctrines and uses theories occurring in one area of discussion as evidence for claims occurring later in other areas. To show this clearly, one must distinguish how Russell actually proceeds from doctrines of analysis and acquaintance. These doctrines do not help us to see what he actually does.

What Russell does in analysis, besides clarifying the question at stake, is to construct arguments and counter arguments; the end result is a hypothesis or, at times, several. The latter case is illustrated by his analysis of our knowledge of relations. Because he expects to address the observational reports of physicists, Russell focuses on knowledge of *time sequence*. He imagines a person hearing a series of sounds: the starting point of Russell’s analysis (the empirical premise) is the person’s belief that he heard a series of sounds because of which he can

understand words like “before” in reports like “one sound occurred before another.” What must be assumed to explain this complex conviction? We must attribute understanding words like “before” to acquaintance with something, he thinks, but it is not obvious *what* that something is (1913, 81). Various arguments lead to the conclusion that, to explain the experience, he must allow universals. Only those universals merited by the data need be admitted, however, since the results of analysis are to be expressed in a minimally theoretical language. After further discussion, Russell concludes that “no difficulty stands in the way of admitting acquaintance with the bare abstract relation itself,” the relation *sequence* (1913, 88). But “other theories would account for the data” as well, such as that there is an abstract relational fact. Since the alternatives do not differ in “any epistemologically important respect” (1913, 89), he chooses the simplest: a bare relation of *sequence* is basic to “before” and “after.”

The above example shows Russell analyzing knowledge of relations on the basis of the doctrines and assumptions of his philosophy. He mentions acquaintance in that discussion, and since *acquaintance* means immediate knowledge of objects (universals or particulars), it might seem to be a method of discovering what there is. This is not what Russell intends nor is it an aspect of his procedure. Rather, when arguments lead him to infer that there must be an entity *x*, he then decides that *x* must be what he is acquainted with, since he has accepted the theory of acquaintance in earlier arguments. Thus, in the case above, Russell briefly entertains the hypothesis that “what we are acquainted with” is an “abstract relational fact” (1913, 89). It might also seem that Russell infers from words to objects, given that, on the doctrine of acquaintance, every word in an analyzed sentence must mean an object of acquaintance. This is not how he proceeds. The analysis of a sentence—the words to use—requires argument, which is often the same argument that results in an inference to the objects that must be assumed.

Besides arriving at theories that give new details to his philosophy, Russell also modifies earlier ones belonging to it. How Russell’s philosophy progresses piecemeal by small changes that preserve the overall theory is illustrated by his preservation in 1913 of the doctrine that *experience* is a dual relation of subject and object even as he abandons his tentative claim in 1911 that we experience the subject or self. In this case, the data is a person’s belief that he experiences things and experiences experiencing of things. How are these convictions to be explained? A cornerstone of the mind/matter dualism that is a part of Russell’s atomist philosophy is the doctrine that A’s experience of an object O is a dual relation between A and O. He does not abandon this doctrine. For a variety of reasons, it “seems an unavoidable inference that A’s experiencing of O is different from O, and is in fact a complex, of which A himself, or some simpler constituent bound up with A, is a constituent as well as O” (1913, 35). Yet the theory that *experience* is a “complex” (specifically, a dual relation) can be maintained, he decides, on the weaker assumption that *something* experiences objects.

Russell's analysis of *experience* also serves to illustrate how a theoretical result in one area of inquiry may become evidence for a thesis maintained in another area. His analysis of *experience* implied that a person might be aware, for example, of seeing a bright patch of color without being able to introspect the act of seeing or the self that sees. The "most attentive introspection failed to reveal any constituent of the experience except the object," the patch of color (1913, 121). This doctrine supports his analysis of *analysis*. By *analysis* Russell means the kind of discovery reported, for example, in sentences like "'cat' contains the sound 'K'" or, generally, "a occurs in aRb." He wants to allow that we may be acquainted with a whole without being "able to discover, by an introspective effort, that we are acquainted with ... its constituents." This is a difficult position to maintain, for if a constituent "could not be so discovered, it is hard to see how we could ever know that it existed undiscovered." Here, Russell refers to the doctrine of experience presented earlier in the text: "we decided that experiencing a given object is a complex, not because direct inspection reveals any complexity, but because experiencing has properties which we did not see how to account for on any other hypothesis." Therefore, "if we were right in our analysis of experience, this instance offers a complete proof of our present thesis" (1913, 121).

Russell's theory of analysis is not his practice of analysis. On his theory, "'cat' contains the sound 'K'" is an analysis, and analysis is defined as the "discovery of the constituents and the manner of combination of a given complex" (1913, 119). This definition may describe the statements Russell makes in his practice, but it belongs to a philosophical doctrine. His practice involves arguments that end in tentative hypotheses. It is this practice that he modifies and extends logical atomism, so that the 1913 version improves piecemeal on that of 1911, which improves on that of 1899.

2b "Analysis Is the Method of Approximation to Reality"⁵

The last section noted that Russell's attempt to give a gradually improving philosophical theory of the world has been misunderstood. The belief that his philosophy is a series of theories may also underlie a tendency to point to Russell's method as the unifying thread in his work. John Slater does so when he says that Russell's "position gained its unity from his commitment to a method." Russell's position is then compared with that of analytic philosophers, for whom progress comes, "if at all, in small increments" (*Papers* 11, xx). The tendency to ignore the unity of a theory that progressively improves is perhaps encouraged by Russell's tentative way of talking about his philosophical results. His caution about metaphysical results and confidence about method may have led readers to suppose that he dismissed metaphysics. It is difficult to know how it came about, but the result of reading Russell this way has been to erase his idea that, by analysis, a philosophy can approximate better and better to reality.

Examples of Russell's practice have been given in support of this conclusion. His remarks about philosophical progress further support that conclusion. The

progressive improvement of a philosophical theory is, first of all, an extension of his notion of progress in scientific knowledge. The transition from common sense to science illustrates the kind of development he has in mind. Theories belonging to common sense developed into science, he says, by “successive approximation.” Common sense maintains, for example, that unsupported objects fall.

When some difficulty has arisen which common sense could not solve, a modification has been made at some point, while the rest of the commonsense view of the world has been retained. Subsequently, using this modification, another modification has been introduced elsewhere; and so on.

(1927b, 193)

Thus, the belief “unsupported bodies fall” remains when exceptions are noted—birds, the moon, helium balloons—and so do other commonsense beliefs. Though a clause makes the original belief accurate over a wider domain, the original belief is a step towards its successor. The properties of helium (etc.) get folded into the larger view and, when new exceptions are noted, they become part of the apparatus assumed in dealing with them. The movement of the whole body of theory in fits and starts is its piecemeal progress.

Much as the body of science developed by modifications from common sense, a scientific philosophy like Russell’s develops by revisions to its doctrines that retain most of the original body of theory. There are, of course, limits on the analogy. Science does not employ a method of radical doubt, but philosophy, on Russell’s view, tries to assume nothing “on the mere ground that it has been assumed hitherto” (1927b, 193). In this respect philosophers admit doctrines only after far more rigorous tests than science applies to the prior knowledge it assumes. Moreover, Russell views philosophy as more general than any special science and as giving “a harmonious picture of the universe and the sciences” (1911, 134). Despite these differences, philosophy is like science in being “a continuing activity, not something in which we can achieve final perfection once and for all” (1927a, 2). Subject to refinement, a scientific philosophy aims to be, at any point, the best available philosophical explanation available of the world and of knowledge. As Russell says in 1911, analytic realism (i.e. logical atomism) is “the philosophy which seems to me closest to the truth” (1911, 133).

To further extend the analogy between philosophy and science, philosophers, like scientists, do not expect their explanations of phenomena to be proven. Because observation and measurement cannot distinguish axiom systems approximating to Euclid’s, were actual space Euclidean, it could not be shown to be *exactly* so. Nor can it be shown to be some system of non-Euclidean geometry. Similarly, many philosophical theories, which are distinct in meaning, are compatible with the data. The aim of a “prudent philosopher” is not to find “one certainly true complete theory in any subject,” Russell says, since “he will be more likely to find that an infinite number of theories are compatible with all the data, and he will assert only the common part (if any) of all these theories” (1918, 128).

Therefore, he must “pare away” from a hypothesis what is “superfluous” (1914b, 94). But, “what can be known with certainty is likely to be discoverable by taking our theory as a starting point, and gradually freeing it from all such assumptions as seem irrelevant, unnecessary, or unfounded” (1915, 86).

It is largely by rejecting appeals to dubious general principles that it became possible for philosophy to admit to being open to progress, rather than claiming finality. In 1904 Russell predicted: “philosophy will never advance, until the notion is dispelled, that sweeping general principles can excuse the patient attention to details, which, here as elsewhere, can alone lead to the discovery of truth” (1904, 575). Twenty-odd years later, he says that philosophers “have too often tried to produce similarly final systems: they have not been content with the gradual approximations that satisfied men of science” (1927a, 2–3). Because it has abandoned appeals to dubious general principles, and because it inquires into possible forms of propositions, philosophy is able to be “piecemeal and tentative” and “to invent hypotheses, which, even if they are not wholly true, will yet remain fruitful after the necessary corrections have been made.” These partially successful hypotheses allow philosophers to “move by steps closer to a true theory” and to engage in “successive approximations to the truth” (1914a, 66), by which Russell means “ultimate metaphysical truth” (1914b, 40). Though he “does not aim, as previous philosophy has usually done,” at “the construction of a comprehensive system” (1924b, 460), Russell nevertheless thinks “[p]hilosophy should be comprehensive, and should be bold in suggesting hypotheses as to the universe which science is not yet in a position to confirm or confute. But these should be presented *as* hypotheses, not ... as immutable certainties like the dogmas of religion” (1924a, 176).

Another reason for believing that Russell revises his philosophy piecemeal from within, beyond the foregoing examples of his actually following this practice, is that he explicitly says that he does. In 1959, referring to his adoption of logical atomism in 1899–1900, Russell says: “The change in these years was a revolution; subsequent changes have been of the nature of an evolution” (1959, 11). His philosophy changed in significant ways over the decades, it is true, but even the major changes are, on his view, stages in the evolution of a single comprehensive theory. For a philosophy to evolve, some original elements must remain relevant in later stages of the philosophy. With the exception of Russell’s shift from idealism to logical atomism, even dramatic changes, like the rejection of mind/matter dualism, retain large portions of the previous system.⁶ On the continuum from common sense to science, at some point it is necessary to call one “science” and the other “common sense.” Similarly, there are changes in Russell’s philosophy sufficiently great to lead him to abandon a label (e.g. “realism”). Despite this, there is a continuity of theory.

3a Knowledge in Philosophy

The conception of philosophy that prevails in the analytic tradition may not prepare us to find, in Russell, a philosophical theory of the world that changes

and improves. For the same reason, it may not prepare the reader for Russell's view of philosophical knowledge as uncertain. It was noted above that analytic philosophers aim at knowledge, and that it is not highly uncertain knowledge that they are thought to value, but definite results, such as the theory of descriptions. This expectation may have arisen originally from a misreading of Russell, which then helped to shape analytic philosophy, or it may have emerged because a generation of readers, for unknown reasons, came to feel distaste for metaphysics and to admire results of a different kind. Whatever the source of this reading of Russell, Russell's work is often used as a model for more or less lasting results, such as the theory of descriptions, while his metaphysical outlook and emphasis on uncertainty get far less attention. Since this fact may cause Russell to be misread, his view of philosophical knowledge needs to be briefly sketched.

First, Russell denies that philosophy is a source of esoteric knowledge. In fact, Russell rejects philosophy's claim to special knowledge quite early in his career. Since "a philosophical proposition must be general," this fact, he says, "has led to the belief that philosophy deals with the universe as a whole." It has led, in other words, to the idealist belief that only one whole, the universe, is ultimately real. "The traditional view would make the universe itself the subject of various predicates which could not be applied to any particular thing in the universe, and the ascription of such peculiar predicates to the universe would be the special business of philosophy" (1914a, 64–65). Yet neither the unity of a person's experience nor the "tentative and partial unity" of scientific law justifies belief in a universe above and beyond the things in it (1914a, 59). In contrast to the above view, the true business of philosophy is to examine the principles of reasoning underlying the sciences. Because there is no universe as an entity or whole distinct from its components, inquiry into principles does not give knowledge "concerning the universe as a whole" (1912, 150). And because there is no knowledge about "the universe as a whole" (1912, 141), there is "no special source of wisdom open to philosophy" (1912, 149). The effect of his philosophy is to diminish "the extent of what is thought to be known" (1914b, 243), and "all this supposed knowledge in the traditional systems must be swept away" (1914b, 244).

How does Russell view philosophical knowledge? Although philosophy provides no esoteric knowledge of the universe, Russell allows that philosophical propositions are general and *a priori*. To maintain its generality he need assert only "that there are properties that belong to each separate thing, not that there are properties belonging to the whole of things collectively." The philosophy describing this perspective is "called logical atomism or absolute pluralism," Russell notes, "because, while maintaining that there are many things, it denies that there is a whole composed of those things." Thus philosophical propositions concern "all things distributively" and all properties, or all of the kind of properties that apply to anything, regardless of its "accidental nature" (1914a, 65). In 1914, Russell does not yet sharply distinguish, as he later does, between logic and philosophical logic. When he describes philosophy as the "*science of the possible*," he means the

inquiry into propositional forms and their constituents and the propositions in logic that “can be made concerning everything without mentioning any one thing or predicate or relation” (1914a, 65). Thus, philosophical propositions include propositions in logic as well as the propositions in philosophical logic (1914a, 65).

Turning to philosophical logic, its propositions include, for example, “*before* is a relation.” These propositions express knowledge of a sort. Thus, in comparison to traditional logic, Russell writes, “while our knowledge of what is has become less than it was formerly supposed to be, our knowledge of what may be is enormously increased” (1927a, 238). Philosophical logic is the essence of philosophy, or essential to it, because it supplies it with “abstractly tenable hypotheses” (1914a, 66). And important philosophical knowledge is the kind that lies in “the formation of hypotheses where empirical evidence is still lacking” (1924b, 460). Used by a philosopher, “abstractly tenable hypotheses” enter into a philosophical theory. These philosophical theories are more general than those in the special sciences. That is, the special sciences provide unifying explanations of natural phenomena, but philosophy moves back a step and provides explanations that give “unity and system to the body of the sciences” (1912, 154). Thus, philosophy aims “primarily at knowledge,” but “the knowledge it aims at is the kind that gives unity and system to the sciences, and the kind which results from a critical examination of the grounds of our convictions, prejudices and beliefs.” If philosophical theories that give unity and system to the sciences are *probable*—when they make it possible to account for knowledge in all of the sciences—then philosophy can claim to provide a kind of knowledge of the world, although not a kind that consists of a “body of definitely ascertainable knowledge” (1912, 156).

When Russell says that philosophy aims “primarily at knowledge” (1912, 154), it may not be clear what kind of knowledge he means. Russell says, and emphasizes, that a scientific philosophy may yield definite results or definite knowledge. A reader who finds these two themes in Russell may identify them. This is a mistake. For Russell, definite results are not philosophy. Despite their origin in philosophical inquiry, definite results, *because* they are definite, belong to science. Here, Russell’s choice of terms is unfortunate. He means to sharply *separate* philosophy from science—from definite knowledge—but the label “scientific philosophy” encourages a different impression. Thus, “as soon as definite knowledge concerning any subject becomes possible, this subject ceases to be called philosophy, and becomes a special science” (1912, 155). In general, “a question may at one stage belong to philosophy, but at a later stage may become scientific, if it has been found to be soluble by observation and experiment and logical analysis.” This is in fact what has happened in logic. By the 1940s, logic is “too definite, too little open to speculative uncertainty to have the distinctive character that may be regarded as giving the definition of philosophy” (1945?, 225).

Definite knowledge, Russell says, “whether in science, in mathematics, or in logic, though it may afford data to the philosopher, is not itself, properly

speaking, part of philosophy” (1945?, 224). For Russell, when we turn towards definite results, we are not looking any longer at philosophy. The analytic tradition takes Russell as a founder, but it is not what Russell thinks is *philosophy* that helps to found it.

3b A Speculative Interest in the Universe

The theory of descriptions, Russell’s most famous result, is famous partly because it remained unchallenged for decades. Thus, in the 1960s Leonard Linsky noted that, “in the forty-five years preceding the publication of Strawson’s ‘On Referring’, Russell’s theory was practically immune from criticism” (Linsky 1967, ix). This fact is worth mentioning because it describes the kind of expectations and values that may inadvertently enter into and distort our understanding of Russell. In this case, the problem is not that we attribute to Russell a belief in the value of results that are lasting and universally acknowledged. He does not question the value of such results. The problem is that we may begin to treat these results as belonging to philosophy, when, as noted above, he does not view them as such, and that we may ignore or dismiss the kind of knowledge or result that Russell attributes to *philosophy*, which is uncertain and revisable. Moreover, we may misunderstand the value he places on either kind of result.

It has been noted that any solid or definite achievements flowing from philosophy belong to a science; indeed, these theories may inaugurate a science. In 1914 he says that, “by the suggestion of fruitful hypotheses, it may be indirectly useful in other sciences” (1914b, 28); in the 1940s the point is repeated: “philosophical speculation ... has shown itself a valuable preliminary to exact scientific knowledge” (1946, 378). This is one of the triumphs of a philosophy that proceeds “piecemeal,” yet the value of such a philosophy, for Russell, lies primarily in a different fact. As noted above, philosophy aims at knowledge of “the kind that gives unity and system to the sciences” (1912, 156) and is “concerned with the harmony of the whole body of special sciences” (1927a, 2). These unifying theories do not provide “any supposed body of definitely ascertainable knowledge,” and the value of the inquiry lies “in its very uncertainty.” Philosophy’s primary value is that it consists of knowledge that is *not* definite and *is* revisable.

It is “part of the business of philosophy,” Russell adds, to “keep alive that speculative interest in the universe which is apt to be killed by confining ourselves to definitely ascertainable knowledge” (1912, 156). “To keep alive the interest in such questions, and to scrutinize suggested answers, is one of the functions of philosophy” (1946, 379). It is difficult to keep such remarks from sounding like empty platitudes, and, as Russell is well aware, some individuals will respond to them with disgust. In 1912 he mentions how “men, under the influence of science or of practical affairs, are inclined to doubt whether philosophy is anything better than innocent but useless trifling, hair-splitting distinctions on matters concerning which knowledge is impossible” (1912, 153). And in the 1940s he notes how

some men “decry all interest in problems not having the circumscribed definiteness that is necessary for scientific treatment” (1946, 378). Such an attitude, he implies, tends either to identify philosophy with definite knowledge or regard it with contempt.

Unfortunately, Russell's way of explaining the value of philosophy may have an effect that he does not intend. When he attributes either of the above reactions to “a wrong conception of the ends of life, [and] ... of the kinds of goods which philosophy strives to achieve” (1912, 153), Russell risks exasperating or antagonizing a reader, or he risks losing a reader's attention by his elevated moral tone. A sympathetic reader may find it faintly embarrassing to read such sentiments and hasten through them on the suspicion that, if not out of place, they are at least not important to Russell's philosophy. This is unfortunate because, although Russell *is* moving discussion into the moral sphere and is seeking an elevated tone, he is doing so with a point in mind that is connected with his philosophy.

When Russell refers to “a wrong conception of the ends of life,” *et cetera*, he is less pronouncing in advance what the ends of life are and what kind of knowledge is good, than warning against closing off possibilities. This position is consistent with his atomistic philosophy. Just as the analysis of a particular concept, say, *equals*, is not decided in advance, so the value of a particular kind of knowledge is not decided in advance. That is, one of the things we do not know now is what will come to have value for us. In particular, we cannot assume the value a particular pursuit of knowledge may have for us, and, by implication, neither can Russell. Philosophers must be prepared to question “preconceptions, ethical as well as scientific” instead of assuming that they “already know for certain what the good life is” (1927a, 240).

Russell makes this point about philosophers whose systems of philosophy confirm their ethical, religious, or political beliefs. “Philosophical inquiry ought not bend the facts to suit a prior conception of what is right and good” (1914a, 57). This is because “ethical notions” reflect the “present desires of men” and, when they determine the result of metaphysical inquiry, they represent “an attempt, however veiled, to legislate for the universe” on the basis of our desires (1914a, 63). A similar attempt to legislate for the universe appears in the pursuit of knowledge if we insist “that the knowledge obtained shall be such as we should have thought edifying before we obtained it” (1927a, 240). Philosophical study, study of any kind, may alter our conceptions of the “elements in life that have value on their own account” (1927a, 242), including, among those elements, the kinds of knowledge we value. If we decide in advance that a pursuit of knowledge must produce the kind of knowledge we currently value, we are forgetting that our sense of what is good may shift, and we are, after a fashion, pursuing philosophy *a priori*.

Consistent with his philosophy and the points made above, Russell's evaluation of philosophical knowledge evolves over his career. In his late work, though he continues to think “the utility of philosophy, on the theoretical side, is not confined to speculations which we may hope to see confirmed or confuted by science

within a measurable time,” (1946, 378) he comes to value the history of philosophy somewhat more and for different reasons than in earlier years. He has always been aware that, historically, “respect for fact is more difficult for the human mind than the invention of remarkable theories” (1948, 142). Galileo’s observation of Jupiter’s moons was rejected, he points out, because the number of planets must be seven. But in later years, the history of philosophy also serves to counteract the sort of philistinism noted above: the preoccupation with definite results and practical matters. By encouraging the study of philosophy’s history, Russell evidently hopes to encourage the kind of reflection that results in ambitious theories about the world. Unlike the grandiose philosophical schemes of the past, these theories should be conscientious, tentative, and accountable to the best available scientific knowledge. He does not abandon the attempt “to understand the world as well as possible” (1927a, 240).

Notes

- 1 Soames writes that in the 21st century we can no longer expect “grand, deductive philosophical systems” of the world, but can still develop “illuminating overviews of large areas of philosophical investigation” by “working from the ground up—moving from the trees to the forest, rather than the other way around” (Soames 2003, xv–vi).
- 2 Russell says that “on fundamental questions of philosophy”, his position, “in all its chief features, is derived from Mr. G. E. Moore” (1903, xviii).
- 3 See, for example, 1898, 225–26.
- 4 C. D. Broad joked that Russell produced “a new system of philosophy every few years” (see Broad 1924, 79).
- 5 This expression occurs in a 1920 syllabus for a course to be given in Spain (*Papers* 9, 484).
- 6 Russell did not modify idealism to reach logical atomism; as he says, the shift to logical atomism “was so great a revolution as to make my previous work, except such as was purely mathematical, irrelevant to everything that I did later” (1959, 11).

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Entries below usually list both first and later editions of a work. In citing these works, all page numbers refer to the most recent edition listed in its entry, most often a volume of the *Collected Papers*.

Abbreviations: *Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell* (*Papers*), *Logic and Knowledge*, 1956 (*LK*), *Mysticism and Logic*, 1918 (*ML*).

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7

ANALYZING WITTGENSTEIN'S *TRACTATUS*

Anat Biletzki

Laying the Groundwork

In 1921 the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* was published in German; in 1922 it saw the light of day in English. And it has been the turf of a game of interpretation ever since.

We could tell a simple historical tale of that interpretive struggle, trying to follow a certain line of interpretive development loyal to chronology.¹ But, although one can surely pinpoint certain chronological stages in the advent of certain interpretations—indeed, an interpretation naturally begets a response, which is just as susceptible to additional responses, and so on—the story to be told is on the one hand so temporally complicated and on the other so amenable to thematic recurrences that I will attempt to draw a map just as spatial, that is to say, topical, as temporal. Two aspects of the topical developmental picture will hopefully contribute to the main aim of this exercise, which I view as positioning the *Tractatus* in a definitive, significant, highly influential place in the history of analytic philosophy. One is the self-identification of (most of) the interpreters of the *Tractatus* as either analytical philosophers in their own right or as illuminating analytical philosophy while engaging in interpretation. The other—which is more elusive—is the current state of *Tractatus* interpretation, often accused of leading us off the beaten analytical path, that I will attempt to “rescue” back into the analytical camp.²

But this, perhaps, should have been my opening paragraph: Of all the conventional heroes of early and middle analytic philosophy (Frege, Moore, Russell, the Vienna Circle, Austin, Quine, and perhaps some other familiar names), Wittgenstein—both early and later—is perceptibly the most heavily interpreted; more fascinating, and subsequently more elusive, is the fact that the *Tractatus* itself

is the most diversely interpreted of all the analytic texts we have. Diversity is a strange moniker; by diverse I gesture to the astounding array of philosophical subjects and philosophical areas that have been discussed under the umbrella of *Tractatus* interpretation. The latter includes metaphysics, language, logic, mathematics, ethics, metaphilosophy, epistemology, phenomenology, aesthetics, religion, and more; the former is daunting—objects, facts, pictures, thought, propositions, tautologies, truth, bi-polarity, meaning, nonsense, realism, solipsism, form, structure, saying, showing ... and the list goes on, of course. Diversity is also, in this case, a demanding challenge; the diversity of *Tractatus* interpretations is especially unique in housing explicitly contradictory readings—of particular parts of the text, of general ideas in the text, of the text's objectives and aims, of Wittgenstein's motivations in writing the text, and of the very *meaning* of the text. Some celebrate the first sentence of the book as telling us its deepest truth: "The world is all that is the case" (*TLP* 1).³ Others claim priority for the logical parts (most of the *TLP*'s 4s and 5s), even agreeing, with Wittgenstein, that the most important sentence of the *Tractatus* is about logic: "My fundamental idea is that the 'logical constants' are not representatives; that there can be no representatives of the *logic* of facts" (*TLP* 4.0312). Still others emphasize the last sentence—"What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (*TLP* 7)—as the climax of the book. Some recognize a realistic bent in Wittgenstein's talk of objects and facts from *TLP* 1 until *TLP* 2.063 ("The sum-total of reality is the world."). Others stress his anti-metaphysical insistence in putting metaphysics in the realm of meaningless propositions (*TLP* 6.53). Some attempt an orderly understanding of the logical-linguistic system that makes up the main content-parts of the *Tractatus*. Others find its essence in the wrapping, so to speak, which consists of the Preface and the final words, thus imparting to Wittgenstein an ethical (rather than metaphysical, linguistic, or logical) intent in its writing. Importantly, these diverse options of appraisals cannot all be tolerated since they are—together—inconsistent. I venture that never in the history of philosophy has one specific text been so diversely interpreted, and that this is a very knotty sense of diversity.

One outstanding feature of this interpretive field of the *Tractatus* is the self-reflection accompanying the interpretive activity itself. In a sense, one could say that the immense quantity and intensity of *Tractatus* interpretation has given rise to an awareness—by both interpreters and reporters of interpretation—of this Wittgensteinian oddity. First, in the area of so-called Wittgenstein studies, one is less likely to encounter an exchange *with* the author of the *Tractatus* than a conversation *about* him. In other words, dealers in the *Tractatus* are explicitly engaged in questions such as "what was Wittgenstein saying in ...?" or "what did Wittgenstein mean by ...?" rather than in the related, but very different engagements with Wittgenstein, such as "why isn't the world first constituted of objects?" or "ethics and aesthetics are not at all similar." (In a striking mid-point between interpretive questions and straightforward philosophical argument, one meets the flabbergasted "how could Wittgenstein have claimed that ...?") Second, and even

more striking, we are now privy to several attempts at surveying and assessing the project of Wittgenstein interpretation in general, and *Tractatus* interpretation in particular. Call this meta-interpretation. In less than two decades or so, we have seen many explicit, book-length stabs at telling the tale of Wittgenstein interpretation.⁴ And the list of articles, chapters, introductions to edited volumes, and proceedings of conference papers, which preface and explain their contribution by proclaiming an interpretive position (in a camp, against a protagonist, beyond a familiar debate), is virtually innumerable. This proclivity to meta-interpretation, that is to say to a conscious awareness of the interpretive game, is doubly significant in the context of a questioning of analytic philosophy itself.

Beyond interpreting Wittgenstein in general, and beyond interpreting the *Tractatus* in particular, i.e. beyond simply reaching out for an understanding of what the *Tractatus* taught us, there is no denying that one wants to locate it in an appropriate intellectual context. Indeed, one could say that this is not a “beyond,” but rather an “around” that constrains and can nourish our interpretations. Assuming that analytic philosophy is the most evident context for *Tractatus* interpretation is, in some ways, obvious and natural; in other ways it does, of course, beg the question. We must, first of all, be clear about what analytic philosophy is; and if we are (clear about what analytic philosophy is), then we need to show how the interpretation of the *Tractatus* is either limited or enriched by that context and how it receives even more clarity by that same context. But, one can now say, haven't we put the cart before the horse, and egregiously so? For if the *Tractatus* is considered one of the founding texts of analytic philosophy and, more so, if we can only “define,” or at the very least recognize, analytic philosophy by taking account of its constitutive texts—the *Tractatus* being one of them—then locating it in the framework of analytic philosophy puts us in a vicious circle indeed. Even more excruciating is the exercise of *Tractatus* interpretation, given this direction of the *petitio*. Purportedly putting the *Tractatus* in the context of analytic philosophy yet providing a certain interpretation without somehow first defining and characterizing it seems to then coerce analytic philosophy to be what we have interpreted the *Tractatus* to be telling it to be. Analytic philosophy might travel far away from what we might have thought it to be, unrelated to the *Tractatus*. But then, how could analytic philosophy be unrelated to the *Tractatus*, if the *Tractatus* is one of its defining texts? The circle keeps going round and round.

For the purpose of explicating the place and role of the *Tractatus* in analytic philosophy, that is to say, for the purpose of expounding on the contribution of the *Tractatus* to the interpretive history of (members—philosophers and texts—of) analytic philosophy, I propose to take the following way out. First, I assume here a generally reasonable introductory characterization of analytic philosophy as having to do *essentially* with language, logic, and metaphilosophy. I will organize the relevant interpretations of the *Tractatus* in a way that seems to me to be loyal to the facts of the interpretive history of the *Tractatus*, drawing a basic distinction between “mainstream” and “new” readings. This will put me in a position to

interrogate what the interpretive debates were about, but will also lead to the suggestion that, in a certain intangible sense, these disputes could be (and have been) taken as questioning precisely the *Tractatus*'s place in analytic philosophy. Coming around full circle, then, this may prove a fruitful step in the despairing quest for an interpretive history of analytic philosophy.

Interpreting the *Tractatus*

The *Tractatus* was first seen, and then established and maintained, as a deeply philosophical text on logic and language. It was, of course, titled *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and for a long time no one doubted the sincerity in Wittgenstein's prefatory claims: "The book deals with the problems of philosophy and shows ... that the method of formulating these problems rests on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language" (*TLP* Preface). Yet, taken together with its famous early passages, about the world, reality, facts, states of affairs, and objects, it is not to be wondered at that the connection of language and the world, through the prism of logic, became the mainstay of its first, and then continuing, mainstream interpretations. Unsurprisingly, however, this focus on language and world thrusts one immediately into questions of metaphysics; so one could say, initially, that the *Tractatus* was also a metaphysical tract. How to countenance, then, for example, one of the earliest projects of interpreting the *Tractatus*—that of the Vienna Circle—as the anti-metaphysical "bible" of their logical (or empirical) positivism? This movement, back and forth from anti-metaphysics to metaphysics, and the related attempts to analytically expose Wittgenstein's complex positions on language, logic, world, and metaphilosophy, is what is termed, in the vernacular of Wittgenstein interpretation, the mainstream, or standard (Biletzki, 2003), or orthodox readings of the *Tractatus* (Kahane et al., 2007).⁵ But before we elaborate some more on this mainstream, and persuade ourselves of its legitimately earned status as and in analytic philosophy, we detour for a moment to its main challenger—the family of interpretations so earnestly labeled a *new* interpretation, which posits a "New Wittgenstein."

At a relatively late date in the ongoing enterprise of *Tractatus* interpretation—usually identified as occurring in the 1990s, but with some famous harbingers earlier on—there seemed to emerge a new family of readings that could be described via two important perspectives. One was the relative importance attributed to the wrapping, so to speak, of the text: the admonition that Wittgenstein gives early in the preface, but more especially in the final sections of the book, concerning how it is to be read—as a piece of nonsense that deserves silence rather than speech. "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them ... What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (*TLP* 6.54, 7). The other point, clearly related to the first, is precisely that all-important term—nonsense. As the *Tractatus*

had dealt systematically with the limits of language, distinguishing between those parts of language that were sensible and those that were lacking sense (with an additional bifurcation made between nonsense and senselessness), it had elaborated on what makes certain sentences pieces of nonsense. That meant, as Wittgenstein spelled out explicitly, that the sentences of the *Tractatus* itself were indeed nonsense. The New Wittgensteinians saw themselves as interpreting the text with great fidelity, and thereupon not “chickening out,”⁶ but rather reading it “resolutely”⁷ in identifying it as nonsense.⁸ But let us first follow the mainstream readings, before we move on to the new; and then ask about the admissibility, and impact, of either or both as analytic philosophy.

Mainstream *Tractatus*

A chronologically organized list of the most commonly recognized early interpreters of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* would consist of thinkers who are undoubtedly considered analytic philosophers. The list includes tens of well-known names and I do not at all aim here at comprehensiveness; rather, my goal is of representational description. It begins with Russell and Ramsey in the 1920s, goes on to the Vienna Circle in the 1920s and 1930s, and then mentions Max Black, Elizabeth Anscombe, Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker, Brian McGuinness, and David Pears. (In the 1990s the list becomes unmanageable.) They are—almost all—analytic philosophers.⁹ So it is safe to say that Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* was interpreted as, accepted into, and read mostly by the stalwarts of analytic philosophy. The fascination with these mainstream analytic readings of the text arises, right from the beginning, from the disagreements that they seemed to display—in assessing Wittgenstein's general philosophical goals and in understanding many of his logical and linguistic claims. Still, it is worth asking whether there is something that makes them all analytic readings, and, if there is, then what is it? I venture that, as mentioned above, it is the centrality of the language–world connection, with that connection being, of necessity, logically focused and leading to a metaphilosophy, that is the axis upon which all analytic readings of the *Tractatus* hinge. That being said, however, we cannot suppose the exact same linguistic or logical analysis at the basis of all their appraisals; neither can we assume agreement in their articulation of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy.

Russell, Ramsey, and the Vienna Circle can be crowned as supplying the original interpretations that then became the fundamental grounds for the development of the Tractarian interpretational field in analytic philosophy. Reading the *Tractatus* means reading Russell's introduction; and that sometimes means, for unsuspecting readers, accepting Russell's presentation as an essential part of the *Tractatus* itself, rather than as only one more interpretation (even if the very first). To counter that positioning, one could have noticed Ramsey's review of the book (1923), which includes some divergence from Russell's insistent reading, and, even more telling, Wittgenstein's quip: “I'm afraid you haven't got hold of my main

contention ...” (von Wright, 1974). Still, it is interesting to note that Russell is the one who is used when we read the *Tractatus*, while Wittgenstein’s dissatisfaction and Ramsey’s argument with it are not always common knowledge. So it was left to the eminence enjoyed by the *Tractatus* in the workings of the Vienna Circle—not really at odds with Russell’s introduction—to provide the first and most influential analytic reading of the text. The Circle could adopt Wittgenstein’s picture theory of meaning—which provided the criteria for the meaningfulness of all types of statements, be they empirical, logical, mathematical, ethical, or metaphysical—in order to ground their own insistence on the empirical as being the only sort of knowable propositions. More important, they could use his distinction between meaningful and nonsensical statements to support their own assertions regarding the centrality of scientific knowledge and the insidiousness of metaphysics. In other words, they read the *Tractatus* as an anti-metaphysical tract, providing them with logical and linguistic justification for their (meta)philosophical vision.

I want to note, significantly, that an analytic interpretation of the *Tractatus*, delivered by center-posts of the analytic tradition like the Vienna Circle, may be “wrong” and can certainly be challenged from within the tradition. So, for example, the Circle read their own verification principle of meaning into the *Tractatus*; this is now consensually agreed upon as a grave misunderstanding of Wittgenstein, but the negative assessment itself is offered by other analytic philosophers. Just as controversial is the Circle’s anti-metaphysical reading of Wittgenstein and the conflicting metaphysical interpretations of other analytic philosophers. This supposed controversy, in fact, is the fulcrum on which I base the identification of a standard or orthodox school of thought regarding the *Tractatus*. Recall that the mainstream has to do with locating Wittgenstein’s main interest in the *Tractatus* to be in the question of how language and world logically relate, and with how this relationship impacts the doing of philosophy. So imputing to Wittgenstein an anti-metaphysical view, as the Vienna Circle did (with or without the verifiability criterion), is no more or no less analytical than seeing him as propounding a metaphysics. And, indeed, it is almost impossible to read the *Tractatus* without being drawn into metaphysics.

We could categorize the readings that variously engage with metaphysics in the following way: First—or at least historically first—would be the anti-metaphysical interpretations, of which the Vienna Circle is the outstanding icon. Here the anti-metaphysics is a metaphilosophical position, admonishing the philosopher to disengage from metaphysical ruminations or claims.

The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions.

(TLP 6.53)

Second are interpretations of Wittgenstein that do identify metaphysics in the *Tractatus*. These can be naïve readings that follow the book's progression from facts and objects, to thought, and then to language, connecting them through the picture-analogy. Such a metaphysics could answer to "realism," if what is emphasized is the independent reality or world that starts the textual progression. Less naïve, but still metaphysical, understandings of the text might adopt "solipsism" or "idealism" if they advance to the later statements on thought and language as equally definitive of the metaphysics. Finally, there can be a more sophisticated type of reading, which recognizes that, although the textual progression goes from world to thought to language, Wittgenstein's whole exercise is predicated on the priority of linguistic analysis: Without the logical analysis of our language we have no access to the world which our language (and thought) pictures. Anything we might say about this world—the play of states of affairs and facts, the independence of objects, the atomicity of facts—is derived from the analysis of the logical structure of propositions. This is not anti-metaphysical; on the contrary, it is a sophisticated metaphysical reading of the content of the *Tractatus* (though it would still have to make peace with the metaphilosophical anti-metaphysical warnings that Wittgenstein adheres to in his tirade against the nonsense of metaphysics writ plain).

An important issue that rears its head in the standard readings, and which becomes a substantial springboard for the move to non-standard interpretation, is the proverbial say–show distinction that serves many Tractarian interpretations. Straddling both the problem of nonsense, which is attributed to propositions that cannot picture the world (i.e. propositions of ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics, and all of traditional philosophy), and the conundrum of Wittgenstein's self-description of the work done throughout the *Tractatus* as a nonsensical ladder to be thrown away, the say–show distinction "saves" the standard readings by attributing to certain nonsense the capability of being shown rather than said. Wittgenstein tells us that "[w]hat *can* be shown, *cannot* be said" (*TLP* 4.1212)—thus leaving open a crack through which philosophical statements, including those of the *Tractatus*, although not being really sayable, are still of showable significance. They are not empty even though they are nonsense, precisely because they show what they cannot say. And it is through their logical form, retrieved by logico-linguistic analysis, that we can discover their shown nonsensical meaning.

The "New" Wittgenstein

One cannot but admit that on the stage of Tractarian interpretation there is a relatively new actor—a school of readings which has earned the moniker of "The New Wittgenstein." How novel it might be or whether and how it is truly different from the mainline of interpretation—given that the mainline is diverse to the point of housing categorically contradictory readings of the *Tractatus*—are questions that we will forego; suffice to acknowledge that in the Wittgensteinian

“community,” the New Wittgenstein readings have garnered an interpretive maelstrom. Another question, one which will merit asking, is whether the New Wittgenstein readings can be legitimately characterized as analytic philosophy.

But first, what makes an interpretation a New Wittgenstein interpretation? In the context of the *Tractatus* one can almost summarize those facets that are central to this reading in the two points adumbrated above: an acceptance of the casing, so to speak, of the *Tractatus*, i.e. the preface and the final sentences, as more significant than its complex logico-linguistic contents, and a due understanding of Wittgenstein’s centerpiece concept of “nonsense.” These two points are intimately connected: working out the multifaceted internal steps of the *Tractatus* (that lead, as we have seen, from world to thought to language to metaphilosophy, all the while investigating the logical form of these steps) is a typical, analytical reading of the content of the text. Part of the reading involves understanding the limits of language (and thought and world), which is to say, understanding the difference between statements with sense and those that are nonsense. But that means admitting, at the end, that most of what the *Tractatus* is saying is, itself, nonsense. That, of course, leads to the beginning and the end of the text and Wittgenstein’s famous 6.54—“He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.” Really understanding the *Tractatus* means throwing it away.

Hide Ishiguro (1969), Warren Goldfarb (1979), and Brian McGuinness (1981, 1985) went rogue early on concerning both the naïve and sophisticated standard readings of this progression. The anti-realism they espoused could not be viewed as simply another metaphysical reading (as one might talk of idealism, for example); it was a general desertion of the fold, doubting both metaphysical and anti-metaphysical Tractarian received wisdom, and intimating things to come. Enter Cora Diamond, the consensual founder of the new reading, who first presented this unnerving view of Tractarian mores in “What Nonsense Might Be” (1981) and then reinforced it in *The Realistic Spirit* (1991). Where sophisticated orthodox readers had tried to salvage the contents of the *Tractatus* by turning to the say–show distinction, thereby making peace also with Wittgenstein’s enjoining of silence, Diamond offered the legion “chickening out” as their descriptive yet somewhat derogatory label: any reading of Wittgenstein that does not appreciate that what cannot be said cannot be communicated in any “showable” way either is, finally, a chickening out. Throwing away the ladder means exactly that—not holding on to any of its rungs at any point in the discussion; that is to say, treating the *Tractatus* resolutely as nonsense.

Such an interpretive agenda is truly revolutionary (whether right or wrong, appropriate or not, well received or not), given that most of the Tractarian interpretive history revolved around trying to make sense of Wittgenstein’s words on logic and language while adhering to a constructive program. Whether readings embraced metaphysics (or anti-metaphysics) or not, and whatever “ism” they labeled Wittgenstein with, there was always a content to be ascribed to his various decrees, even if some of that content was ineffable. The New Wittgensteinians

were now chiding us to take Wittgenstein seriously in precisely that aspect of his work that seemed most destructive—nonsense, about which one should be silent! The early harbingers were already engaging in challenging orthodoxies of any kind in the 1970s and 1980s, but it is mostly in the 1990s that this novel way of attending to Wittgenstein acquired such status and popularity. One should note James Conant's trenchant readings (1990), which were adjoined by most readers to Diamond's works to produce the oft-called Diamond/Conant interpretation. Tom Ricketts (1996) and Warren Goldfarb (1997) brought the engagement of the new reading to a "resolute" stage, much of which was enacted in the volume that made it all ideologically explicit—Crary and Read's *The New Wittgenstein* (2000).¹⁰

The resolute reading of the *Tractatus*, that is to say, the reading which does not shy away from admitting that we are really and truly facing nonsense in the *Tractatus* (and not just being told by the *Tractatus* how to identify meaning and keep out nonsense), did—and does—have its detractors and was immediately, upon its introduction, actively attacked by some of the more orthodox interpreters. First among them was Peter Hacker, whose "Was He Trying to Whistle It?" (2000) was, indeed, included in *The New Wittgenstein*. Hacker systematically attempted to bring substantial evidence for positive, no-nonsense, Wittgensteinian credos—the picture theory attesting to a harmony between world, thought, and language; the logical relationships between propositions; the logical structure of the world; the limits of thought and the limits of reality—that cannot be easily canceled out from the text. Like him, Hans-Johann Glock (2007), Daniele Moyal-Sharrock (2007), and Ian Proops (2001), among others, have provided resolutely irresolute interpretations that refuse to go the way of newness. But, except for arguing with resolute New Wittgensteinians about the correctness of their understanding of the Tractarian text, mostly by continuing to show how supposed nonsense can be made sense of via the productive parts of the *Tractatus*, the more vital question, to my mind, that should be posed to any resolutist is—what is one to do with such a disparaging position? In other words, where can we go from here, if we accept the New Wittgenstein reading which accepts the *Tractatus* as being real nonsense?

Reading the New Wittgensteinians sympathetically, that is to say, reading them without the acrimony that seems to have accompanied the interpretive debate between orthodox and new since the early advent of this new family of readings,¹¹ we can point out two suggestions made by this allegedly "wild" reading (sometimes even termed "nihilistic") that ground it in a worthwhile and fruitful methodology serving this new ideology. First is the intriguing use of "dialectic," a term and, more than that, a reading practice that is extolled by Goldfarb as early as 1979—and is used by others as well (such as Juliet Floyd)—to explain the way a resolute reading can be realized. A dialectical reading of the *Tractatus* moves along the text, from one of its starting points to a later one that seems to contradict it, then returns with the negation to undermine the earlier point, then moves on to a more inclusive position that might recognize both, yet

both still as contradictory, and so on. Certain notions are undercut, but the movement keeps going forward, only to realize, at its end, after a lot of analytical work, that it has nowhere left to go. Such reading, as a true interpretive methodology, allows the Tractarian reader to understand a working nonsense.¹²

The second point of departure, in a way even more promising for continuing interpretive work, is the admission by New Wittgenstein readers that, contrary to supplying us in its strictures with an explicit negative position on the *Tractatus*, the resolute reading is a programmatic vision: if one accepts this understanding of the *Tractatus*, one is not obliged to cease doing interpretive work on it (after claiming it is nonsensical to the core) or to desist from analyzing and explicating its many mysteries. Rather, working resolutely (and perhaps dialectically), one goes on to scrutinize the text, bit by bit, piece by piece, and show how each particular issue that is brought up by Wittgenstein can be made to cohere with the entire radical reading. Diamond, and the other New Wittgensteinians,

articulated a program for interpreting the text. That is not yet to interpret the text. An actual resolute interpretation of the text will involve the working out of *how* the interrogation of its pronouncements goes ... [and] lead us to the recognition that those pronouncements are nonsense. It must be done case by case.

(Goldfarb, 2011, p. 15)

The *Tractatus* and Analytic Philosophy

So we are faced with a “war”—as was so blatantly claimed in the title of the volume, *The Tractatus Wars*—between a panoply of very different interpretations that still adhered to the mainstream understanding of the early Wittgenstein as dealing with language, logic, and metaphilosophy and a perhaps less diverse, but yet no less enriching grasp of the book’s challenge to its own analysis. How do either, or both, of these deep conceptions of the *Tractatus* fare in our views of analytic philosophy?¹³

We have acknowledged that one is hard put to answer this query without first committing to a specific definition of, or, at the very least, a general position on, analytic philosophy. But instead of surveying the inordinate number of proffered definitions, it might be beneficial to scrutinize a different look at analytic philosophy, submitted by those who provide a meta-discussion, so to speak, of the multitudinous definitions. Very systematic and nuanced is Glock (2004), who shows us the different ways one can pursue a definition of analytic philosophy—topical, doctrinal, methodological, stylistic, historical, and by family resemblance—and convincingly puts Wittgenstein (early and later) in the analytical camp, basing his verdict on historical and family-resemblance criteria. Differently oriented is Preston (2004), who takes all definitions of analytic philosophy to task: going into the problematics of historical infelicities and equivocal uses of “analytic

philosophy," he identifies a crisis in and about analytic philosophy and cautions us to the possibility that its unity—as a philosophical school—is an illusion. Both of these meta-discussions will serve us well, momentarily, in addressing the status of the *Tractatus* in the setting of analytic philosophy.

Still, for the moment, I harken back to the relatively consensual construal of analytic philosophy as dealing with the essential combination of language, logic, and metaphilosophy. I go on to claim that the orthodox (or standard, or mainstream, or previously dominant) reading of the *Tractatus* was naturally and legitimately accepted as one of the classics of analytic philosophy. The fact—and I do accept it as a fact—that the logical or empirical positivists of the Vienna Circle, who are certainly stalwarts of analytic philosophy, misinterpreted Wittgenstein does not thereby lead to the fallacious conclusion that the *Tractatus* was not itself an establishment canon of analytic philosophy. What is important is that it was understood in a certain way—the way of analytic philosophy—and that its ideas, however interpreted, were ones to be engaged, argued with, and either accepted or denied within the context of analytic philosophy.¹⁴

Seemingly, the more perplexing question has to do with the *Tractatus* of the New Wittgensteinian readings and its position *vis à vis* analytic philosophy. Now, a simple answer can abide by the fairly encompassing conception of analytic philosophy given in the previous paragraph and claim, somewhat inelegantly perhaps, that its dealings with language, logic, and metaphilosophy—despite being newly and revolutionarily out of the box—are enough to accord it membership in the analytic club. Perhaps even more simplistic is the recognition that the method of interpretation conducted by many New Wittgensteinians is highly analytical. In fact, many of the currently recognized, leading analytical philosophers are also the leading New Wittgensteinians: Tom Ricketts, Juliet Floyd, Warren Goldfarb, John McDowell, and even—at certain times and in certain positions that he took re Wittgenstein—Hilary Putnam. Their radical renditions of the New Wittgenstein are superbly logical, linguistic, and metaphilosophical. Indeed, being an analytical philosopher should not be taken to contradict radicalism; one can be a radical analytic philosopher!¹⁵

Admittedly, these are simple or simplistic criteria that turn to simple and simplistic characterizations of analytic philosophy. Viewing the New Wittgenstein in a more complex manner, i.e. a view of the New Wittgensteinian *Tractatus* that emphasizes, for example, its despondency and dead-endism, leaves it outside the pantheon of analytic philosophy precisely because of its radical difference from “good old-fashioned analytic philosophy.” In that case, one can consistently claim that the “war” between the mainstream and New Wittgenstein readings of the *Tractatus* is a feud between understanding the *Tractatus*’s profitable offerings (in language, logic, and metaphilosophy) and reading it as offering very little indeed in the way of a constructive philosophy. This could then be facilely recast as a confrontation between those who see the *Tractatus* as an analytical text and those who do not. The *Tractatus* wars then become differently defined, but well defined indeed.

Mainstream readings of the *Tractatus* are moments of analytic philosophy; New Wittgensteinian interpretations are not.

I take a very clear, contrary, stand: The *Tractatus*'s engagement with logic, language, their bearing on the world, and the metaphilosophy that puts it all together, whether interpreted standardly or in new mode, make it an icon of analytic philosophy. A justification for this stand is, at this point, an exercise that still needs working out. But the primary suggestion is that the war between the orthodox reading of the *Tractatus* and the New Wittgenstein rendition of its message is actually no war; it is rather, in a very real sense, a progression of interpretations parallel to and evocative of precisely the conundrum of analytic philosophy itself, represented by the point of (current) culmination in its evolution from the early 20th to the beginning of the 21st century. The optimism and enthusiasm that were the distinguishing marks of early analytic philosophy have now, after one hundred years, brought the philosophical community—sometimes even the philosophical analytic community—to an acknowledged skepticism regarding the original analytic pretensions and presumptions and an attendant crisis concerning its future. Now, we can view the interpretations of the *Tractatus* as travelling, in corresponding fashion, from logical positivism, to metaphysical and anti-metaphysical extractions, to logical readings, to sophisticated “isms,” to ... the nonsense readings. But that history, and those parallel moves, from positive content to doubtful self-retrospection—whether by Wittgenstein readers or by analytic philosophers—should not surprise us at all. The correspondence between these two movements (*Tractatus* interpretation and analytic philosophy) is striking, albeit subtle. Not for naught do we see both standard and new readers of the *Tractatus* engaging so intensively and comparatively with, beyond the questions of what Wittgenstein was saying, the meta-question of what the program of Wittgensteinian interpretation involves. Analytic philosophers are similarly challenging the program of analytic philosophy. Perhaps we can all learn from the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, certainly an analytic philosopher, who told us that the thing “in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved” (*TLP* Preface). That may be what analytic philosophy should tell itself about its problems as well.¹⁶

Notes

- 1 Such is, for instance, the orientation of “Part I: History of the Reception of Wittgenstein’s Work” in Frongia and McGuinness (1990).
- 2 Note that these remarks could be similarly made about Wittgenstein interpretation in general and on interpretation of the *Philosophical Investigations* as well. The three projects are not unrelated, but we devote the present one to readings and discussions of the *Tractatus*. Where relevant, we will point at the other two contexts.
- 3 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, hereafter *TLP*.
- 4 (*Over*)*Interpreting Wittgenstein* (Biletzki, 2003); *Wittgenstein and His Interpreters* (Kahane, Kanterian, & Kuusela, 2007); *Wittgenstein and Analytic Philosophy* (Glock & Hyman,

- 2009); *Beyond the Tractatus Wars: The New Wittgenstein Debate* (Read & Lavery, 2011); *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: History and Interpretation* (Sullivan & Potter, 2013).
- 5 Crary and Read, in *The New Wittgenstein* (2000), use "standard" and "orthodox" to describe what they are coming out against. Warren Goldfarb, in "Das Überwinden: Anti-Metaphysical Readings of the *Tractatus*" (2011), calls these standard interpretations the "dominant" readings.
 - 6 More on this shortly, but "chickening out" is the (in)famous term from Cora Diamond's "Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*" (1988).
 - 7 Having become the most-oft used epithet for New Wittgenstein interpretations, this was first suggested by Thomas Ricketts, in an unpublished manuscript, "The Theory of Types and the Limits of Sense" (1992).
 - 8 The New Wittgensteinians also have a lot to say about the later Wittgenstein. Their interpretation highlights the "therapeutic" understanding of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Also, more so, this reading of the therapeutic Wittgenstein insists on a less stringent division between the two Wittgensteins, early and later, surprisingly (to some) attributing a therapeutic motive to the *Tractatus*.
 - 9 An independently significant interpreter is Stanley Cavell. His contribution to Wittgensteinian interpretation is immeasurable but, even according to his own lights, he is more involved in the later Wittgenstein than in the *Tractatus*, admitting that he does not understand the latter. This is pertinent to us only due to the additional Cavellian perception of analytic philosophy: "[I]n a sense, to write your own words, to write your own inner voice, is philosophy. But the discipline most opposed to writing, and to life, is analytic philosophy" (quoted in Giovanna Borradori, 1994). If Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* was, according to Cavellian criteria, an analytic philosopher, then he is little deserving of Cavell's philosophical attention.
 - 10 Some other new readers are Kremer ("The Purpose of Tractarian Nonsense," 2001), McGinn (*Elucidating the Tractatus: Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy of Logic and Language*, 2006), McManus (*The Enchantment of Words: Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 2006), and many others. Recall (note 8 above) the emphasis that the New Wittgenstein reading puts on the "therapeutic" and its use in positing an important connection or affinity between the two Wittgensteins. This question has given rise to meta-interpretive disagreement as well. Thus, for example, Read and Lavery (2011) literally see "resolutism" as emphasizing a therapeutic continuity between early and later Wittgenstein and Goldfarb likewise claims that resolute readings connect the Wittgensteins (in more ways than one). Kahane, on the other hand (in the introduction to *Wittgenstein and His Interpreters*, 2007) insists that the therapeutic reading of the later Wittgenstein does not necessarily entail a resolute reading of the early.
 - 11 Of a certain infamy is the 2001 Wittgenstein Symposium in Kirchberg, Austria, where, on the heel of the publication of *The New Wittgenstein*, the debate between orthodox and new interpretations reverberated in rancorous tones.
 - 12 See especially Floyd (2001).
 - 13 Irrelevant to our question are the group of interpretations that have been termed "Continental" (Biletzki, 2003), or "Irrationalist" (Glock, 2007).
 - 14 I once thought that only the standard-reading Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* was analytic, while he of the *Philosophical Investigations* was not (Biletzki, 1998). Interestingly, and naturally contingent on various definitions of "analytic philosophy," some assessments view the later Wittgenstein as meriting the title of analytic philosopher. See, e.g., Frongia and McGuinness (1990), who place analytic philosophy as "successor" of neo-positivism, "with which Wittgenstein's later work was associated." Similarly, Beaney (2013) puts the *Tractatus* under the purview of logical positivism and the later Wittgenstein under that of analytic philosophy.
 - 15 Glock (2004), who thinks that both the early and later Wittgensteins are analytical (given a very nuanced characterization of "analytic philosophy"), seems to believe that

Wittgenstein's ideas being "ingenious and radical" makes him, at times and at certain places, not analytical. I differ, in not identifying between analytical and not-radical.

- 16 There is an apparent affinity between some of the questions and thoughts in this article and those in Glock's (2004). I have greatly profited from Glock's article but, apart from his treatment of Wittgenstein "in all phases of his career," different from my focus on the *Tractatus* alone, there is a real divergence between us in looking at the New Wittgenstein readings—which Glock views as "irrational" and non-analytical. This article has tried to justify the new readings' legitimate place in analytic philosophy.

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8

THE LATER WITTGENSTEIN

Duncan Richter

Ludwig Wittgenstein is a towering figure in the history of analytic philosophy, but his work has relatively little influence on this tradition today. This is much as he predicted, and perhaps even as he would have wanted. In the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* he writes that he is publishing the remarks in it “with misgivings” and that “of course, it is not likely” that it will bring light into anyone’s brain, due to the book’s “poverty” and “the darkness of this time.”¹ The basic reason for the decline of interest in Wittgenstein among analytic philosophers is that his approach to philosophy is at odds with that of most philosophers today, or at least is taken to be so, both by most followers of Wittgenstein and by those who largely reject his work. This is especially true of his later work, which will be my focus in this chapter.

Wittgenstein’s early *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* was presented in a way that was potentially unattractive. It is full of technical notation. It is largely empty of explanatory steps. Its author claims to have solved all the problems of philosophy, at least in essentials, which is almost breathtakingly immodest. He also claims to have written sentences that elucidate by being perceived to be nonsensical, which is off-puttingly obscure. Yet the book was very popular with the logical positivists who dominated analytic philosophy in the early 20th century. The *Investigations*, in contrast, is non-technical, provides more guidance for the reader, makes no claim to have solved any philosophical problems, and is not presented as containing mostly nonsense. This book too was highly popular and influential for a decade or two, but it has now retreated from the limelight. Partly, perhaps, this is the inevitable fate of any fashionable work. But there are also substantial differences between philosophy and its purpose as Wittgenstein conceives them in the *Investigations* and as most analytic philosophers conceive of them today. Wittgenstein aimed not to solve problems by providing answers but to make the problems

themselves disappear, to show them to be rooted in confusion.² Contemporary philosophers are much more interested in solving them and deny that the problems they work on are little more than symptoms of intellectual error. Wittgenstein also wanted to return words from metaphysical uses to ordinary use.³ Today's philosophers have a renewed interest in metaphysics, while ordinary language philosophy, which took a serious interest in the ordinary use of words, was in vogue for a time, and still has its adherents, but is generally regarded as being a thing of the past.⁴ Wittgenstein also distinguished between philosophical questions, on the one hand, and scientific questions, on the other. That distinction has been questioned, especially following work by Willard Van Orman Quine. I will not be able to go into detail on all of these issues, but I will attempt a sketch of the territory in what follows.

As P. M. S. Hacker writes, "Different waves of Wittgensteinian ideas successively broke upon philosophers" in the decades after the Second World War.⁵ This makes his impact on post-war analytic philosophy almost impossible to survey, especially in anything less than a long book. On the other hand, Hacker notes, "By the mid-1970s, interest in Wittgenstein's work was waning."⁶ Instead of Wittgensteinian philosophy there was a "tide of science-emulating, theory-constructing philosophy."⁷ Wittgenstein, in contrast, took pains to point out differences between philosophy and science and saw the advancing of theories as alien to philosophy properly conceived.⁸ The un-Wittgensteinian tide that Hacker describes can be attributed to the positive influence of American philosophers such as John Dewey and Quine, to a negative reaction against Wittgenstein and similar philosophers, such as Gilbert Ryle, and to the general intellectual mood of the times.

D. M. Armstrong, in "The Causal Theory of Mind," tells the following version of the story.⁹ The success of science in the modern era made it unclear what role remained for philosophy and philosophers. Wittgenstein saw philosophy as having nothing to do but untie knots that it itself had tied. Ryle saw the work of philosophers as consisting in mapping conceptual geography. This had the advantage of "continued employment for members of the profession" but suffered from unacknowledged smuggling of substantive views (such as behaviorism) into the supposedly disinterested analysis of concepts.¹⁰ Armstrong also credits a better understanding of science, thanks in large part to the work of Karl Popper, which helped philosophers to see that science is not all a matter of empirical observation but also of speculation, theory-construction, and reasoning. These latter are all activities for which philosophers are well suited.

Before I say more about the waning of Wittgenstein's influence, however, we should look more at what he said and how it has been taken by other philosophers. Wittgenstein claimed not to be advancing any theses, and if he did nevertheless advance some despite himself it would not be possible to summarize, explain, and defend them in one short chapter. He described his own work as consisting of sketches, so I will have to make do with a sketch of these sketches, or a kind of

cartoon version of Wittgenstein here.¹¹ Wittgenstein thinks of philosophers as essentially metaphysicians asking Socrates-style questions of the form “What is x ?” As the early Socratic dialogues inquire into the nature of such virtues as piety and courage, so later philosophers take themselves to be inquiring into the nature of such things as time and mind. Like Socrates, they want an account that provides both necessary and sufficient conditions for something’s being a mind (or a case of knowledge or the meaning of a word or whatever it might be), that is, a strict definition of exactly what is, and what is not, a mind. Also like Socrates they come up short time after time. Two of the main reasons for this, Wittgenstein suggests, are that not all nouns have strict definitions of this kind and that it is misleading to think of time, mind, meaning, and so on as things in the first place. Not that they are illusions, but we tend to think of things as being, or at least being like, physical objects, and this is a very confusing way to think of the things that philosophers typically investigate.

The best-known example of the first point is games.¹² It is hard to identify necessary and sufficient conditions for something’s being a game because so many different activities fall into this category. A game need not involve a board, and not everything involving a board is a game. What goes for boards also goes for balls, teams, cards, and fun. Wittgenstein suggests that we call different things games not because they share a common essence but because they share a “family resemblance,” that is, they look alike or strike us as being similar.¹³ Not necessarily to each other, so that every game resembles every other game, but to some other member or members of the family. If some concepts are like this then it is a mistake to assume that there *must* be some essence of mind (or true proposition or sensation or art or good deed) for philosophers to find.¹⁴

Another problem, according to Wittgenstein, besides the fact that not every kind of thing can necessarily be strictly defined, is that not every noun names a kind of thing in the first place. Games might be hard to define, but they are not mysterious in the way that time and consciousness appear to be. They are not spooky, “metaphysical” or psychedelic. Questions about the nature of the mind or of time, however, do (or can seem to) have this property. Wittgenstein thinks that this is because we take nouns to name or refer to objects of some kind, but if a mind is an object then it seems to be one of a very strange kind. His response is to suggest that nouns do not all refer to objects of any kind. If we want to know the nature of minds then we should look not for some class of objects to which we refer when we use the word “mind” (and related words) but instead at how we use these words. This need not involve any fieldwork because we already know how to use these words and can easily see for ourselves, if only we think about it, how we do and do not, would and would not, use them. By thinking about uses of words we can dispel the bogus aura of mystery that fascinates the philosophical mind and see that what had perhaps seemed an intractable, or at least significant, problem was really just a muddle. This, very roughly, is what Wittgenstein thinks about philosophy, language, and mind. I will say a little more

about some of this later, but my immediate concern is with the influence of these ideas on other people.

The first major movement associated with Wittgenstein's later work is ordinary language philosophy (OLP). It is not easy to say exactly what OLP is, but the minimal idea, obviously enough, is that ordinary language is important in some way to philosophy. Slightly less minimally, one could say that OLP takes the meanings of words to depend on the context in which they are used, so that context-free discussions of words and the concepts they are used to talk about are likely to be empty. The later Wittgenstein seems to have thought this, although one could practice OLP without agreeing with Wittgenstein about everything. Rather like a practitioner of OLP, he wrote the *Investigations* with very little technical terminology and said (in §116) that his aim is to bring words back to their everyday use. He (also like OLP) is sometimes taken to endorse the view that ordinary language is not just all right as it is (see *Investigations* §98) but sets a standard of correctness, so that any combination of words that would not ordinarily be used is therefore objectionable. This view is widely rejected by philosophers, who are apt to introduce new concepts and write in unconventional ways. Wittgenstein himself did this with notions such as language-games (rule-bound activities that constitute part or all of a language) and forms of life (ways of living that are inseparable from the uses of language with which they are intertwined), as well as his discussion of some very odd examples, such as people who each carry around a box containing some unknown thing that they call a "beetle" (see *Investigations* §293).

The point of the idea of language-games is that (as Wittgenstein sees it) language is not just a symbolic representation of possible realities but a tool, or set of tools, that we *use* according to certain *rules*, and that different bits of language might work in different ways, according to different sets of rules. The idea of a form of life is similar but on a larger scale. Understanding language requires not simply knowing what each word represents but knowing how words are used in people's lives. So Wittgenstein does introduce some non-ordinary terminology and does say some potentially surprising things. Nevertheless, the perception that he thought that the ordinary is correct and the unusual is unacceptable has probably contributed to the marginalization of his work.

Arguably, what the later Wittgenstein (and perhaps the earlier Wittgenstein too) wanted was to help people clarify their thinking. A widespread view of the goal of OLP, though, was that it was concerned with linguistic analysis or the analysis of concepts. Its target, that is to say, was not people or their minds or their thinking but rather the words or concepts or language with which people think. After a couple of decades of partially Wittgenstein-inspired philosophy as linguistic analysis there was a sense that insufficient progress had been made. There was also a sense that what mattered were not words but things.¹⁵ And that, Quine's having shown that philosophy is continuous with science, there is no good reason why philosophy cannot concern itself with actual things and even make discoveries about them.¹⁶ Metaphysics, in short, was back.

One piece of Wittgenstein's philosophy that survived a relatively long time, at least as a subject considered worthy of discussion, is the so-called private language argument (PLA). As Anat Biletzki writes in *(Over)Interpreting Wittgenstein*, though, "rarely has a philosopher been so widely interpreted" as Wittgenstein, and there are multiple versions of this argument.¹⁷ One of the most famous comes from Saul Kripke, who claims to be presenting neither his own view nor Wittgenstein's, but "rather Wittgenstein's argument as it struck Kripke."¹⁸

Kripke's Wittgenstein brings together the PLA with the remarks on rule-following, which had previously been treated as largely separate issues. The PLA is found in §§244–271 of the *Investigations* and concerns a language used by an individual to refer to the contents of his or her own mind. Interpretations of the argument, and indeed beliefs about whether there is an argument here or not, vary, but the standard view is something like the following. Think of the contents of one's mind, for instance sensations, as objects of a special kind. When a certain one of these objects appears I might expect to be able to name it and then use this name to refer to it again in the future. But if both the original naming and all subsequent reference to the sensation take place entirely within my own mind, with no correlated physical causes or effects and no possible confirmation or correction by others, then how can I know that what I now refer to is the same as the object I originally named?

This is where Wittgenstein's beetle comes in.¹⁹ Think of the contents of a box as an object called a beetle. The "object" could be real or imaginary, in one piece or many. It is just whatever the box contains (even if that is nothing). If no one but the box's owner ever knows anything about the contents of that box, except that, whatever it is, it is called a beetle, then what the "beetle" is is irrelevant as far as the language-game of talking about beetles in boxes goes. I have a beetle and you have a beetle. In that sense we have the same thing.

This is not a question only, or primarily, about the reliability of memory. It is a question about the meaning of the words "the same" in this context. Since every physical object is distinguished from every other by its spatio-temporal location, no two such objects are ever exactly the same. Two peas in a pod, for instance, are the same in the sense that they are both peas, both green, both similarly sized, and so on, but one is here and one is there, so there is at least one difference between them, and there may well be other (small or otherwise irrelevant) differences too. Correctly identifying two different things as the same (in all *relevant* respects) requires the existence and application of criteria of sameness. But in the PLA case no such criteria have been identified. It is doubtful whether they could be identified. For the object in question is meant to be a bare sensation, nothing but a feeling of *this*. Its definition is purely subjective, which seems to rule out the possibility of any objective criteria of identity. Which means, or at least so it seems, that the name of this sensation is correctly used whenever its user feels like using it. Which, Wittgenstein suggests, is just to say that the name has neither a correct nor an incorrect use. It is not a name at all but only a sound with no meaning.

The rule-following considerations also have to do with criteria of correct and incorrect uses. And these cannot be private in the sense of the PLA. Using a word correctly means following the rules that govern its use, which must be independent of this use if we are to talk meaningfully about correctness and incorrectness in this case. There has been debate about the nature of the required independence. Since the PLA refers to mental objects, independence of the mind might be thought to be enough. However, since it also refers to a language used by just one person, independence from this person might be considered necessary. Hence interpreters of Wittgenstein have debated whether a solitary individual could have a language, without others to provide criteria for correct use of the language, as well as whether language is possible without physical criteria.

Kripke takes up Wittgenstein's mention of the problem of interpretation: "This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule."²⁰ Any rule can be interpreted in various ways, and any meta-rule that explains how to interpret a rule correctly can itself be interpreted in various ways. And this has the potential to create an infinite regress. So how can we ever identify the correct interpretation of a rule? Kripke's suggestion is that the community of language-users determines the correct interpretation. What they take or accept as correct is correct, and what they treat as incorrect is incorrect. Idiosyncratic interpretations will then straightforwardly be wrong. If I pronounce "tomato" the same way as the rest of the community, then my pronunciation is correct. How do we determine whether two people say the same word in the relevantly same way? With reference once again to the community. It follows that solitary, community-free language use is not possible. Without a community there is, according to this view, no possibility of discriminating between correct and incorrect. Hence there is no meaningful sense in which any use could be correct or incorrect. Hence there is no correct or incorrect and there are no rules in the so-called "language" in question. Without rules there is no grammar, and with no grammar there can be no meaning.

An example might help here. The most famous example concerns the rule "+ 2" and a student who seems to understand the rule for adding two but, once the numbers get above 1,000, continues the series 1,000, 1,004, 1,008, and so on.²¹ This strikes the student as doing the same thing as going from 990 to 992, then 994, and so on. A student like this is likely to seem both bizarre and wrong to us, but what (if anything) *makes* him wrong? Kripke's suggestion is that the correct interpretation of the rule, the (true) meaning of the rule, is the one accepted or agreed upon by the relevant community. What we all take the rule to mean is what the rule means. If we all find it natural to "count in twos" thus: 996, 998, 1,000, 1,004, 1,008, ..., then that is what "counting in twos" will mean. (Assuming we do not all insist that doing what comes naturally to us in this case is in fact incorrect.) But this is not what we do, so the student is wrong.

The advantage of this theory is that it stops the otherwise potentially infinite regress of interpretations of rules and interpretations of interpretations. The

linguistic community's interpretation is correct and needs no further interpretation. The buck stops with the community and what it accepts or does not accept. It does not interpret or need to interpret any more than this. It simply takes some interpretations as correct and rejects others. The downside of the theory is that it can seem self-defeating. If the community determines correctness, then one would expect the community to determine the correctness of, along with everything else, the view that the community determines correctness. But this is not necessarily the case. Perhaps in our relativistic age it is a widespread view, but it need not be. The community could reject all such relativism, perhaps believing that God or a Platonic Form or some other standard ultimately determines correctness in rule-following. Or else the community might have no view whatsoever on such an abstruse question.

One might also wonder whether something else could be done with the thought that the community does not interpret every rule or interpretation of a rule. It simply reacts, either accepting or rejecting the interpretation in question. If a community could do that could an individual do it too? This is what Wittgenstein appears to imply in *Investigations* §201 when he writes that "there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases." I do not, the idea is, interpret a rule and then act on it in a way that the community of language-users deems (without interpretation) to be either correct or incorrect. Rather, I grasp the rule in a non-interpretive way and act accordingly (in ways that, indeed, will be judged to be correct or incorrect by others). The regress of interpretations stops at the level of the individual rule-follower (at least sometimes), not at the level of the community as Kripke suggests. Perhaps the community is the *ultimate* arbiter of correctness, however.

Kripke's version of Wittgenstein's argument can appear to imply a rather self-defeating kind of relativism, which may have contributed to the waning of interest in Wittgenstein's work among analytic philosophers. It also lends support for readings of Wittgenstein as a kind of relativist, one concerned with what others will or will not let one get away with. This is close to Richard Rorty's idea of what truth is, and his version of Wittgenstein is another that we should consider here.²²

Being somewhat skeptical about the idea of truth, or at least of Truth, Rorty reads texts with an eye not to finding out what the author really meant to say but rather to finding what is most useful in them. Like Kripke, then, Rorty does not claim to offer the real Wittgenstein. Instead he offers a useful, ideally the most useful, interpretation of notable elements (but by no means necessarily all elements) of Wittgenstein's work. Rorty finds in Wittgenstein an emphasis on themes of contingency and irony. What makes sense and what does not in our language, the grammar and the concepts that we have, are contingent, not given by God or the Forms, say. They are the result of our particular form of life, of the way we happen to live and the environment we happen to live in, which doubtless has

shaped the way we live. Our concepts, being contingent in this way, are neither correct nor incorrect but can only be judged as more or less useful. If it is useful for us to call a sentence true or an action virtuous, then we should do so. But no sentence will ever be true in the sense of matching the way the world really is in itself. So there is, arguably, a certain irony, a certain not really meaning what we say, built into our language and the form or forms of life with which it is intertwined. The importance of the community for making judgments, for determining what we can and cannot get away with doing and saying, makes solidarity a third key concept for Rorty, although he does not see philosophy as a way to create such community in the way that it can give rise to irony and awareness of contingency.

In "Wittgenstein and the Linguistic Turn," Rorty notes that contemporary philosophers differ profoundly about "whether Wittgenstein is worth reading" as well as about what, if anything, can be learned from his work.²³ Rorty goes on to say that naturalists "typically see little value in Wittgenstein's work"²⁴ and "do not read Wittgenstein at all."²⁵ Naturalism is a dominant view in contemporary philosophy but Rorty does not count himself among the naturalists. They, he says, reject, or simply want to move beyond, the linguistic turn. Those whom Rorty calls "Wittgensteinian therapists," in contrast, regard the linguistic turn as important, and believe that philosophers typically fail to give meaning to some of their words. Rorty himself takes up a third position, that of the Wittgensteinian pragmatist who values the linguistic turn but regards metaphysics not as nonsense but as simply "a waste of time."²⁶

Pragmatic Wittgensteinians, or Rorty himself at least, value most in Wittgenstein his thoughts on rule-following, private language, and ostensive definition. They "think that his really important contribution was to formulate arguments that anticipate, complement and reinforce [...] criticisms of the language-fact distinction, and [...] criticism of the idea of knowledge by acquaintance."²⁷ Two themes here are emphasis on practice and rejection of the idea of reality as given. With regard to rule-following, Wittgenstein can be taken to have shown that rules do not dictate how they are to be followed: practice does. So far as this practice is physical there cannot be a purely mental or "internal" language, and so far as this practice is social there cannot be a purely individual or private language. Nor can words be defined ostensively (just by pointing at the object they are said to refer to, for instance) because a word's meaning depends on the rules for its correct use, and these depend on practice, not just objects. An object does not dictate how it is to be used or responded to. Similarly, we cannot distinguish between facts on the one hand and language on the other, because facts have no meaning without being taken in some way, and this taking will be practical, linguistic or interpretive, and likely social too. Finally, knowledge by acquaintance could be seen as a problematic idea for the later Wittgenstein because it suggests understanding without concepts. I cannot know what pain (or love or democracy or God) is simply by experiencing pain (or love, etc.) because pain is what we

talk about when we talk about pain, and what that is depends upon linguistic conventions or rules of grammar, not just individual subjective experiences.

In some ways lying between analytic and continental philosophy at this point in history Wittgenstein is in somewhat the same boat as pragmatists such as Rorty. Wittgenstein himself has been read as something of a pragmatist too. One reason for this is his idea that the meaning of a word, in at least a large number of cases, is its use in the language.²⁸ There is also his emphasis on practice in, for instance, quoting Goethe's line "Im Anfang war die Tat" (in the beginning was the deed) in *On Certainty*²⁹ §402 and suggesting that at the end of a line of inquiry into human thought or action lies practice: This is simply what I do (*Philosophical Investigations* §217).

Pragmatist readings of his work take such remarks to be anti-Cartesian, rejecting the picture of human beings as rational agents perceiving the world more or less as it is in itself and then acting in response on the basis of their practical, moral, and other goals. Instead, it is suggested, before we can intellectually or rationally respond to the world we first need to make sense of it, and this requires developing concepts. These concepts in turn will reflect our interests, as well as our nature and the environment in which we find ourselves. We will not have names for colors we do not see, for instance, whether this is because of the way our eyes work or because there simply happen to be no, say, blue things around us. But we also might have no concept of "blue" if blueness makes no difference to us. On the other hand, if the blue berries are good to eat but the red ones are poisonous, then red and blue are likely to be concepts we develop quickly. This, though, will not be an especially rational process. Rather, the key thing is behavior. Those who respond to the difference between red and blue in one way will die while those who respond otherwise will survive, other things being equal. And in this kind of way a distinction between red and blue might come to be part of our lives. It will emerge as a result of natural, physical contingencies, not be designed intentionally. And rather than being the basis of behavior that distinguishes between kinds of berries, it will itself be based on such behavior.

The idea that meaning is use can be taken in a similarly behavior-based way, although it need not be. One different sense of use involves what might be considered a psychological or semantic component. Many Wittgensteinian philosophers agree with John Searle, who argues, by way of his famous Chinese Room thought experiment, that a machine cannot understand language and so cannot really think or be intelligent.³⁰ Searle's argument is a response to the so-called Turing test for artificial intelligence, named after Wittgenstein's one-time student Alan Turing. The basic idea of the test is that a machine that cannot be distinguished from a human being based on its responses to written questions would count as intelligent. Searle disagrees. The Chinese Room is a fictional room containing a person who knows no Chinese, a large supply of Chinese characters, and an instruction book that tells the person which characters to pass out from the room in response to certain others' being passed in. Like a computer, Searle

argues, such a room might be able to respond *as if* it understood Chinese, but it would not really do so. Hence, his point is, it is a mistake to think that we might be able to create artificial intelligence (rather than, say, something that might be called “artificial intelligence” but that is not really a form of intelligence at all).

Others argue against Searle that a better understanding of “meaning is use” implies that a room or a machine really could understand language, as much as anyone can. As long as the room uses characters as a Chinese speaker (or reader and writer) would, then it uses language as people do. And since meaning is use, the room or machine means the characters that it uses. What matters is the practical matter of what gets done. Questions about whether the machine *really* understands introduce an unnecessary problem, or set of problems: what constitutes *real* understanding?, how can we ever tell whether it is present?, what difference does it make?, and so on. Daniel Dennett, for instance, is a Wittgenstein-inspired philosopher who takes issue with Searle. Rather than wonder who or what really understands or really is intelligent, Dennett proposes that it is sometimes useful to adopt the “intentional stance” towards an object or person.³¹ Adopting this stance means talking and thinking and responding to the object or person as if they were intelligent without wondering whether they “really” are or not. The only question that matters is what is useful, not what accurately captures a possibly unknowable metaphysical reality. Rorty is sympathetic with Dennett’s position, regarding Searle-type questions about what is “really” the case as useless wheels added unnecessarily to the machinery of our language and thought.³²

This debate about what counts as thinking and intelligence also brings up the question of behaviorism (roughly: the theory that the mental is actually behavioral) and the philosophy of mind more generally. Searle denies that a machine might really have a mind, while Dennett and Rorty care more about whether it is useful to speak and think as if machines have minds. Wittgenstein has been interpreted as supporting both kinds of view against the traditional dualist position. The traditional view of the mind as a non-physical object somehow contained within the physical body is very much out of fashion. Ryle, whose work was certainly influenced by Wittgenstein, rejected this view in his book *The Concept of Mind*, referring to it as both “Descartes’ myth” and the “Official Doctrine.”³³ As Ryle predicts (p. 327), his book has been “stigmatized as ‘behaviourist.’” Ryle’s Wittgenstein-inspired view is largely rejected on the grounds that it focuses too much on behavior and not enough on the brain, and that it fails to distinguish genuine cases of, say, pain from pretend, acted-out cases of mere pain behavior, on the one hand, and between stoically concealed cases of pain from pain-free cases, on the other. Wittgenstein has also been taken to be a behaviorist of some sort (partly because of certain interpretations of the PLA), leaving him open to the same kinds of criticism. This, too, has likely contributed to the sense that Wittgenstein’s work belongs in the past, that it represents a step forward from Cartesianism but that this step has itself been superseded by others.

It is perhaps inevitable that any figure who occupies center stage in philosophy will at some point move, or be moved, to the side. This need not be permanent, however, and if a degree of marginalization is bound to occur simply with the passing of time then perhaps we can expect theory-building and science-emulation to fade too. This seems likely if, as Wittgenstein might predict, the attempt to construct something positive or to discover new truths by way of philosophy comes to nothing. That is a big “if,” of course, but if science-minded philosophy is productive then Wittgenstein would seem to have been wrong. If he was right then there is reason to hope that his work will come back into favor.

The diversity of interpretations of Wittgenstein’s work that Hacker and Biletzki point out also means that his work is likely to be regarded as a rich mine from which to extract new ideas and, perhaps, solutions to philosophical problems. As marginal as he might be now, he is not marginal everywhere, and it is not so long ago that he was not marginal at all. There is certainly an important place for him in the history of the analytic tradition, and as long as that remains true his work is unlikely to be either completely forgotten or completely ignored.

Notes

- 1 Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 4e.
- 2 See *ibid.* §133.
- 3 See *ibid.* §116.
- 4 Two recently published attempts to change this situation are Avner Baz, *When Words are Called For: A Defense of Ordinary Language Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 2012) and Sandra Laugier, *Why We Need Ordinary Language Philosophy*, trans. Daniela Ginsburg (University of Chicago Press, 2013) (originally published in 2000 in French).
- 5 P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein’s Place in Twentieth-Century Analytic Philosophy* (Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1996), p. 137.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 8 See *ibid.* §126 and §128.
- 9 D. M. Armstrong, “The Causal Theory of Mind” in David M. Rosenthal (ed.) *The Nature of Mind* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991), pp. 181–188.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- 11 See *Investigations* p. 3e for Wittgenstein on his work as an album of sketches.
- 12 See *ibid.* §66.
- 13 See *ibid.* §67.
- 14 A popular counter to Wittgenstein’s view is found in Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper* (Broadview Press, 2014), where a game is defined as “a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.” It might be worthwhile to think about whether all games are voluntary and whether all such attempts are games.
- 15 See, for instance, Ernest Gellner’s *Words and Things* (Routledge, 2005) (originally published in 1959), which rejects Wittgensteinian philosophy as trivial.
- 16 See W. V. Quine, “The Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” *Philosophical Review* 60 (1951): 20–43.
- 17 Anat Biletzki, *(Over)Interpreting Wittgenstein* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Netherlands, 2003), p.1.

- 18 Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition* (Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 5.
- 19 See *ibid.* §293.
- 20 *Ibid.* §201.
- 21 See *Investigations* §185.
- 22 See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 176.
- 23 In Arif Ahmed (ed.), *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 129–144, p. 129.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- 28 See *Investigations* §43.
- 29 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds), G. E. M. Anscombe and D. Paul (trans.) (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1979).
- 30 See J. Searle, "Minds, Brains and Programs," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3 (1980): 417–57.
- 31 See Daniel Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (MIT Press, 1987).
- 32 For a Wittgensteinian critique of Dennett and Searle see Maxwell Bennett, Daniel Dennett, Peter Hacker, and John Searle, *Neuroscience and Philosophy: Brain, Mind, and Language* (Columbia University Press, 2009).
- 33 Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Barnes & Noble, New York, 1949).

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9

FRANK RAMSEY AND THE ENTANGLEMENT OF ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY WITH PRAGMATISM

Cheryl Misak

Introduction

Frank Ramsey was a brilliant Cambridge philosopher, mathematician and economist, who laid the foundation for subjective probability theory, invented two branches of economics and one branch of mathematics, and made significant contributions to logic and truth theory. He died in 1930, just shy of his 27th birthday. Ramsey's short life coincided with one of the most important times in the history of analytic philosophy, with Russell, Moore, the Tractarian Wittgenstein, and the early logical positivists working the ground on which analytic philosophy would grow. Ramsey's contributions to this logical analytic revolution were significant. But he also mounted an attack on logical analysis from within. That attack was a pragmatist attack, and had Ramsey lived to continue to subvert the program of logical analysis, I surmise that analytic philosophy would have taken a very different, perhaps better, trajectory.

Ramsey was taken to be part of the logical analyst program. Ayer, for instance, says: "The brilliant Cambridge philosopher F. P. Ramsey was marked as an adherent, but he died in 1930 at the early age of 26" (1959, 6). Ramsey certainly did share some things with the logical analysts. He too employed logical techniques, and he inherited their interest in the foundations of mathematics and in the relationship between propositions and reality. But Ramsey, along with his friend Wittgenstein, were, in different ways, leaving behind the mission of the logical analyst program. As Keynes says in his review of Ramsey's posthumously published collection of essays, he was "departing ... from the formal and objective treatment of his immediate predecessors." He and Wittgenstein had been helping Russell to perfect the formal matters first set out in *Principia Mathematica*. But, Keynes says, the effect was

gradually to empty it of content and to reduce it more and more to mere dry bones, until finally it seemed to exclude not only all experience, but most of the principles, usually reckoned logical, of reasonable thought. Wittgenstein's solution was to regard everything else as a sort of inspired nonsense, having great value indeed for the individual, but incapable of being exactly discussed. Ramsey's reaction was towards what he himself described as a sort of pragmatism, not unsympathetic to Russell, but repugnant to Wittgenstein. ... Thus he was led to consider "human logic" as distinguished from "formal logic."

(*Keynes 1931*, 338)

Keynes' insight is on full display in this passage. Varying interpretations of Ramsey and Wittgenstein abound, but in my view it is Keynes who in 1931 hit the nail on the head. While both Ramsey and Wittgenstein made major contributions to Russell's early logical analytic program, they were both moving away from a philosophy that deployed logic to reduce all knowledge to (or construct it from) a primary, simple, language of things about which we can be certain. Ramsey's move began in 1924, and under his influence, Wittgenstein's started when he returned to Cambridge in 1929, the last year of Ramsey's life. Keynes was also right about the different directions Ramsey and Wittgenstein took.

The Logical Analytic Program

It is hard to define analytic philosophy. Perhaps it is best to describe it as a tradition, one major branch starting with the logical atomist project of Russell and Moore at the beginning of the 1900s.¹ Russell had found compelling the new higher-order, quantificational logic that Frege had offered the world in 1879, and in *Principia Mathematica*, coauthored with Alfred North Whitehead and published in three volumes between 1910 and 1913, he promoted that logic and argued that it is the foundation for mathematics. All mathematical truths can be defined as logical truths and all mathematical proofs can be recast as logical proofs. Russell's way of doing metaphysics and epistemology was shaped by the structure of the new logic, including its requirement that a well-formed sentence is either true or false, with no shades of grey.

In 1899 Moore had published "The Nature of Judgment" in *Mind*, which set the stage for the early work of both Russell and Wittgenstein on the nature of propositions. Against the idealists, Moore argued that an idea cannot be entirely a mental state (1899, 177–8). Rather, an idea is a sign representing something whose existence transcends all our ideas—it gets at the world we are investigating. As Russell was to put it later: "fact is in general independent of experience" (1959, 54). Facts (unless they happen to be facts directly about what I'm experiencing) are not dependent on experience, and it is in the nature of the mind to be in touch with non-mental factual reality.

Moore also argued that propositions are existants. The proposition simply is a fact, and the concepts that constitute the proposition are the entities the proposition is about (1899, 179). Hence there is no difference between a proposition—understood as a mind-independent complex—and what would make it true. The question arises immediately: what kind of relation makes a proposition true and what makes it false? Moore thought that you can't say, but you know it when you see it. Truth is an indefinable relation: "What kind of relation makes a proposition true, what false, cannot be further defined, but must be immediately recognised" (1899, 180). A true proposition has concepts related in one way, and a false proposition has them related in another way. Moore eventually abandoned this position, with its mysterious account of relations and how they might make a proposition true and false. But it shaped the discussion for Russell, Wittgenstein, and Ramsey—indeed, Russell heralded it as the first account of the "new philosophy" (1959, 54).

Russell combined Moore's view of propositions with the new formal logic and embarked on the project, still thriving today, of exploring the relationship between logic, language, experience, and thought. It was a project enthusiastically taken up by Wittgenstein when he began to study with Russell in 1911, and it also engaged the Vienna Circle. Russell called his approach "logical atomism" or "analytic realism." It was an evolution of British empiricism. With the new tools of logic, we are to show how all meaningful thought and language can be constructed out of experience. In 1911, he put it thus:

The philosophy which seems to me closest to the truth can be called "analytic realism." It is realist, because it claims that there are non-mental entities and that cognitive relations are external relations, which establish a direct link between the subject and a possibly non-mental object. It is analytic, because it claims that the existence of the complex depends on the existence of the simple, and not vice versa, and that the constituent of a complex, taken as a constituent, is absolutely identical with itself as it is when we do not consider its relations. This philosophy is therefore an atomistic philosophy.

(Russell 1992 [1911], 133)

It seemed that the pre-war Wittgenstein was also fully enrolled in the program. He too wanted to develop a logically ideal language into which all languages are in principle translatable, so that confusions—in thought in general and in philosophy in particular—could be made transparent and resolved. The culmination of his thought was published after the war, in 1922, as the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In it, he put forward a "picture theory" of meaning on which language, like a picture, represents that objects are a certain way. "The world divides into facts" which he defined as existing states of affairs (2001 [1922], 1.2, 2). These states of affairs consist of absolutely simple objects in a definite structure or set of relations with each other. Every meaningful proposition can be analyzed so it is a truth-function of elementary propositions, and once we get to these elementary

propositions, we get to something that looks completely unlike what we find in ordinary language (3.25, 4.221, 4.51). But if a proposition is to assert a fact, there must be something in common between the structure of the proposition and the structure of the fact (2.161). That form is a logical form. “We picture facts to ourselves” (2.1), and those pictures present “situation[s] in logical space, the existence and non-existence of states of affairs” (2.11). There is a logical space for every state of affairs, and if we could put all these states of affairs together, we would have a picture of the world. Along with saying that the correspondence between elements of the picture and objects is a representation relation, Wittgenstein gives us a number of metaphors to make sense of the idea: a picture is “attached to reality”; it “reaches right out to it”; it is “laid against reality like a ruler”; it “touches” objects with “feelers” (2001 [1922], 2.1511–1515). Another metaphor gives us the concept of truth: “A picture agrees with reality or fails to agree; it is correct or incorrect, true or false” (2001 [1922], 2.21).

This seemed entirely in step with Russell. However, when the *Tractatus*, finished in a prisoner of war camp in Italy, finally saw the light of day, Russell’s world was rocked. For in the Preface and in the final pages, Wittgenstein made it clear that what was really important could not be expressed in the primary language. What was really important were religious and ethical beliefs that somehow transcended the language of logic and experience. Statements about these matters were, strictly speaking, nonsense, and we ought to remain silent about them. He says at the beginning of the book that its whole point is as follows:

The book deals with the problems of philosophy, and shows, I believe, that the reason why these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood. The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.

(2001 [1922], 3)

He ends the book by telling us that:

The correct method in philosophy is to say nothing except what can be said: i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright. What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.

(2001 [1922], 6.53–7)

But while Wittgenstein was clear in the *Tractatus* that not every discourse we consider important is expressible in terms of the language of elementary propositions, only in 1929 did he start to abandon the Russellian framework of elementary and complex propositions, and only in 1932 did he abandon it definitively.

This was the philosophical tradition the young Ramsey was educated into when he came up to Trinity College Cambridge in 1921 as an undergraduate in mathematics, with a burning interest in philosophy. He influenced its trajectory in rather significant ways.

Ramsey and Russell

In *The Analysis of Mind*, and in earlier work, Russell had tried to analyze the relationship between thought and the world in terms of a belief's being true just in case there exists an appropriate entity to which it corresponds (or at least points to), and false if there is no such entity. Russell's domination of the issue seemed secure. Ramsey says: "All accounts of propositions and judgment which I have read are variations of either the propositional theory of judgment or the incomplete symbol theory of propositions" (1991 [1921], 109).

That was written in 1921, when the undergraduate Ramsey read a confident paper to the Moral Sciences Club titled "The Nature of Propositions." It is an attack on Russell's early view of propositions, facts, and truth, and an expression of a problem for Russell's newer multiple relation theory. Of Russell's conception of propositions, which Ramsey takes to now be the familiar and common understanding (at least for philosophers), he says that there simply are no such "mysterious entities" as propositions, "so unlike anything else in the world" (1991 [1921], 112). Objects such as propositions introduce more problems than they solve. And the new multiple relation analysis, even in "the simplest case is so complicated" and for some cases, such as general propositions, it is "infinitely complex" (1991 [1921], 109).

In a 1922 manuscript, he reiterates some of these points and argues that attempts such as Russell's to analyze beliefs into their simple constituents that, in turn, latch onto facts are "misguided":

If you consider the enormous number of logical forms that can be constructed you will see that to get a coherent account of belief in this way is awfully difficult especially as there is also the problem of the constituents of mathematical propositions.

(King's College Archives, FPR 4/1)

General propositions pose a problem for logical analysis, as do mathematical propositions and the connectives within them. The young Ramsey is already starting to rebel against the idea of logical form, as well as against the logical

atomist theory of truth. He is looking for something different—for a coherent account of *belief*.

He offers an alternative picture in the Moral Sciences paper, distinguishing “two kinds of characters” of a mental state such as “a belief, a doubt, or an assumption.” Each is “of great importance” (1991 [1921], 110). The first consists in “the presence or absence of feelings,” which Ramsey calls the “pistic” character. “Pistic” comes from a Greek word, transliterated as *pistis*, associated with persuasion and faith; my mental state’s pistic character, then, pertains to the degree of my commitment to the content in question. It is this character that distinguishes my belief that Socrates was mortal from my doubting that Socrates was mortal. The second Ramsey calls a belief’s “referential characters or references” (1991 [1921], 110). When we assert of a belief that it is a belief that Socrates is mortal, we assert that it has the character of referring to Socrates and to mortality. Although Ramsey would later drop the term “pistic,” he retained this two-character view of belief in his philosophy of mind for the rest of his life.

Ramsey, however, thought that there was something important in Russell’s *The Analysis of Mind*. Russell had in that book seriously considered whether behaviorism might contain some of the answers to the problems of knowledge. Ramsey would later say, “My pragmatism is derived from Mr. Russell” (1990 [1927], 51), a bewildering assertion, until one returns to *The Analysis of Mind* and sees how Russell discussed (but ultimately dismissed) the idea that a belief is a disposition to behave in certain ways. We shall return to this idea below.

Ramsey and the *Tractatus*

Ramsey’s father was a Cambridge mathematician and president (vice master) of Magdalene College. Amongst other advantages, this put the schoolboy Ramsey in contact with Charles Kay Ogden, also at Magdalene. Ogden was the editor of *The Cambridge Magazine* and an energetic organizer and polymath. He was also the editor of the *International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method*, and when Wittgenstein was in post-war turmoil, wrangling with prospective publishers for his manuscript, it was Ogden who stepped up with an offer.² The text was published with the German and English texts side by side, with Ogden named as the editor and translator. In a prefatory note, he says: “The Editor further desires to express his indebtedness to Mr. F. P. Ramsey, of Trinity College, Cambridge, for assistance both with the translation and in the preparation of the book for the press” (Wittgenstein, 1922).

The *Tractatus* was a mighty difficult work, an altogether new and technical attempt to specify the structure of the relationship between language and reality. Ogden, for all his abilities, was no logician, and his reputation as a philosopher was not terribly high. Although Ramsey was an undergraduate at the time, he had won a prize for German at Winchester, and he, unlike Ogden, had the philosophical chops to understand the manuscript. Wittgenstein insisted that the

translation had equal authority with the German text,³ and it is highly unlikely, to say the least, that Ogden got it so right. Ramsey's role in the translation, I submit, was much more than that suggested by Ogden. Indeed, the correspondence between Ogden, Ramsey, Wittgenstein, and, to a lesser extent, Russell shows that Ramsey was involved in sorting out countless translational matters, large and small.⁴

Then, in 1923, Ramsey traveled to Puchberg am Schneeberg, near Vienna, where Wittgenstein was in self-imposed isolation as a schoolteacher. They spent five hours a day for two weeks going through the *Tractatus* line by line, at the rate of a page an hour.⁵ The upshot of both the translation and the visit is that no one understood or had a window into Wittgenstein's early work as did Ramsey. That window opened even wider when Ramsey spent six months in 1924 in Vienna being psychoanalyzed. He went to visit Wittgenstein a number of times and "work" was the "mainstay" of their conversation (McGuinness 2012: 150).

In 1923, before Ramsey had met Wittgenstein, he wrote a critical notice of the *Tractatus* for *Mind*. In it, he pointed out some problems that worried Wittgenstein. For instance, Ramsey argued that it is not a tautology that red and blue cannot be in one place at the same time, as Tractarian picture seems to suggest.⁶ During his time in Vienna, Ramsey wrote to his mother that the piece he turned in for a prize explains "such parts of Wittgenstein that I want to use for my own stuff" (King's College Archive, FPR 2/4).⁷ That is, shortly after finishing his undergraduate degree, Ramsey's work was becoming independent of Wittgenstein's.

Ramsey had more general and more important reservations about the *Tractatus*, reservations he pressed on Wittgenstein hardest when Wittgenstein eventually returned to Cambridge in 1929, a year in which Wittgenstein and Ramsey dominated philosophy in Cambridge. During this time, Ramsey argued vociferously against Wittgenstein's idea that statements of religion, ethics, and philosophy are in a realm of the unsayable. His most famous objection comes in the form of quips: "what we can't say we can't say, and we can't whistle it either" (1990 [1929a], 146); "What we can't do we can't do and it's no good trying" (1991, 51). But he also argued in a more sustained way against Wittgenstein's framework in the *Tractatus*. Philosophy must not start from purported first premises of thought and language, relieved of the burden of assessing their meaningfulness or warrant. The task of philosophy cannot be merely to clarify thoughts by setting out the rules of our language: "The standardisation of the colours of beer is not philosophy, but in a sense it is an improvement in notation, and a clarification of thought" (1991, 55). In Ramsey's view:

Philosophy must be of some use and we must take it seriously; it must clear our thoughts and so our actions. Or else it is a disposition we have to check ... i.e. the chief proposition of philosophy is that philosophy is non-sense. And again we must then take seriously that it is nonsense, and not pretend, as Wittgenstein does, that it is important nonsense!

(1990 [1929b], 1)

Philosophy itself, not philosophy as a ladder kicked away, must serve some human purpose. By 1929, Ramsey had become a pragmatist.

Ramsey's Pragmatist Account of Belief and Truth

In 1923, the first volume of the posthumously published papers of founder of pragmatism, C.S. Peirce, appeared. It was titled *Chance, Love and Logic*, edited by Morris Raphael Cohen and published in the US. A little-remembered fact in the history of analytic philosophy is that Ogden had become a fan of Peirce's, and published this volume simultaneously in England in his *International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method*. Ramsey got a copy hot off Ogden's press, and his fledgling pragmatist ideas took flight. At the end of 1926 and into 1927, Ramsey wrote two important papers: "Truth and Probability" and "Facts and Propositions." Each is threaded with Peirce's thoughts, and together they form the first articulation of Ramsey's pragmatism—his deliberate and thorough linkage of belief, action, and truth.

In "Facts and Propositions", Ramsey continues to deconstruct the correspondence theory that so attracted Russell and the Tractarian Wittgenstein. The paper begins with the statement: "The problem with which I propose to deal is the logical analysis of what may be called by any of the terms judgment, belief, or assertion" (1990 [1927], 34). Ramsey now more confidently takes the fundamental epistemic act to be the endorsing of a proposition or the making of a judgment. He reiterates the position he set out in that 1921 undergraduate paper. When I believe that Caesar was murdered, it seems that this event involves on the one hand, something subjective—"my mind, or my present mental state, or words and images in my mind"—and on the other hand, something objective—"Caesar, or Caesar's murder, or Caesar and murder, or the proposition Caesar was murdered, or the fact that Caesar was murdered" (1990 [1927], 34). Belief seems to involve both subjective and objective factors, as well as some relationship between the two.

Ramsey has until this point more or less followed the structure of "The Nature of Propositions," but now he makes his well-known deflationary remark about truth:

there is really no separate problem of truth but merely a linguistic muddle
 "It is true that Caesar was murdered" means no more than that Caesar was murdered, and "It is false that Caesar was murdered" means that Caesar was not murdered.

(1990 [1927], 38)

This has led many to think that Ramsey adopts a redundancy account of truth, on which talk of truth is a superfluous add-on, supplying no contribution of its own to the meanings of the statements in which it occurs. But in fact Ramsey argues that once you have laid out the matter in this way, it becomes clear that it is understanding the nature of belief, judgment or assertion that will help us

unpack the concept of truth. He prefaces his deflationary remark by saying that he should briefly discuss truth “before we proceed further with the analysis of judgment,” and he finishes the whole discussion by concluding that “if we have analysed judgment we have solved the problem of truth” (1990 [1927], 39). That is, the deflationary move is just a step along the way to an examination of belief, judgment, and assertion, which will provide us with a complete theory of truth. What we have to explain “is the meaning of saying that the judgment is a judgment that *a* has *R* to *b*” (1990 [1927], 39).

In explaining that meaning, we cannot rely on ideas of correspondence. For talk of correspondence to facts adds nothing, since “... is a fact” is equally eliminable from a sentence as “... is true.” So, while Ramsey says that there is no problem of truth, he is clear that what he means is that there is no problem of truth *over and above the problem of assertion or belief*. Brian Loar, I believe, was the first commentator outside of Ramsey’s own group of contemporaries to see that his deflationary thoughts are “ancillary to the far more important foundational concern of the theory of belief or judgement” (1980, 49).⁸ But the typical reading of Ramsey skips over this essential move, a move that we shall see brings pragmatism into the mainstream of analytic philosophy.

Following Peirce, Ramsey adopts a dispositional account of belief, on which belief is a habit to act in certain ways, given one’s desires. If a chicken “believes” that a certain caterpillar is poisonous, it abstains from eating that kind of caterpillar on account of the unpleasant experiences associated with eating them:

The mental factors in such a belief would be parts of the chicken’s behaviour, which are somehow related to the objective factors, viz. the kind of caterpillar and poisonousness. An exact analysis of this relation would be very difficult, but it might well be held that in regard to this kind of belief the pragmatist view was correct, i.e. that the relation between the chicken’s behaviour and the objective factors was that the actions were such as to be useful if, and only if, the caterpillars were actually poisonous. Thus any set of actions for whose utility *p* is a necessary and sufficient condition might be called a belief that *p*, and so would be true if *p*, i.e. if they are useful.

(1990 [1927], 40)

One thing that last sentence seems to convey is that if a belief leads to successful action, the belief is true—and that action will be successful only if the belief is related in the right way to objective factors. I have argued elsewhere that this is what Peirce was up to.⁹ A belief that always would prove successful is true, but only given a sense of “success” involving determination by circumstances, as he put it “not extraneous to the facts.”¹⁰

Ramsey even more clearly gives us a pragmatist theory of content. What it is that makes one belief equivalent to another is that the beliefs have “in common many of their causes and many of their effects”:

To be equivalent ... is to have in common certain causal properties, which I wish I could define more precisely. Clearly, they are not at all simple; there is no uniform action which believing "*p*" will always produce. It may lead to no action at all, except in particular circumstances, so that its causal properties will only express what effects result from it when certain other conditions are fulfilled. And, again, only certain sorts of causes and effects must be admitted; for instance, we are not concerned with the factors determining, and the results determined by, the rhythm of the words.

(1990 [1927], 44)

Beliefs are individuated by their causes and effects, "more especially their effects" (1990 [1927], 44), suitably delineated. On this pragmatist account of what it is for a belief to have meaning, if a belief has no causal impact on our actions, it expresses no attitude of belief at all. What it is to believe *p* is, in large part, to behave in certain ways, and to take the various possibilities as either alive or dead.

Ramsey, though, is clear that belief is not reducible to behavior. Using a well-known Jamesian metaphor, he says that any viable "construction of the fundamental epistemological concepts, 'meaning', 'acquaintance', 'truth', 'knowledge', etc." needs to be centrally concerned with, and to work toward an analysis of, the "stream of experience." For "any system such as behaviourism which does not include experience is evidently wrong or at least incomplete" (1991, 52). Ramsey had in mind a strong behaviorism, against which he wanted to contrast his own position. On this strong view, meaning and mental states consist solely in behavior (or behavioral dispositions). Ramsey thinks that position leaves out something important. It leaves out experience:

I do not believe other people are automata; for I use my experience to forecast their action, and to eliminate experience from this process of inference and recast it in terms of unknown bodily states would be too far fetched.

(1991, 68)

Behaviorism, Ramsey says, "is not false as far as I know; but it is 'insane'" (1991, 70). Remember that Ramsey wants philosophy to be of some use—he wants it to be "realistic" (1990 [1929a], 160).

Ramsey's adds to this pragmatist account of meaning and truth the more general pragmatist idea about the very point of believing *p*. "Truth and Probability" is prefaced with a quote from Peirce on the normative nature of logic and reasoning, and that theme is present also in "Facts and Propositions":

It is evident that the importance of beliefs and disbeliefs lies not in their intrinsic nature, but in their causal properties. For why should I want to have a feeling of belief towards names "*a*," "*R*," and "*b*," when *aRb*, and of disbelief

when not-*aRb*, except because the effects of these feelings are more often satisfactory than those of the alternative ones.

(1990 [1927], 44)

If beliefs can be accounted for in terms of their causal properties, it seems that the normative statuses to which beliefs are subject, including truth, should also be accounted for in terms of their causal properties.

Ramsey ends “Facts and Propositions” by noting that his view of logic derives from Wittgenstein, “except the parts which have a pragmatist tendency, which seem to me to be needed in order to fill up a gap in his system” (1990 [1927], 51). Those pragmatist tendencies have manifested themselves in the ideas that (i) the content of a belief is determined by the actions it commits the believer to; that (ii) the value of believing that *p* just in case *p* is that the effects of believing that *p* will be more satisfactory than believing otherwise; (iii) philosophy must strive to be realistic and useful. Ramsey is right to think that these pragmatist ideas are not present in the *Tractatus*, although Ramsey’s new version of pragmatism would have an impact on Wittgenstein’s post-Tractarian thinking.

Ramsey’s pragmatism only grows in his subsequent work, especially in “General Propositions and Causality” and *On Truth*, two unfinished projects Ramsey was in working on during the last year of his life. The idea that logic and reasoning are normative is only amplified in the book manuscript *On Truth*. While the nature of logic was the focus of much of the early work of Russell, Wittgenstein, and Ramsey, by 1929 Ramsey was drawn to Peirce’s very different view of the nature of logic. On that view, logic is the study of the habits we should adopt and is thus a “normative science.”

Ramsey’s Influence on the Post-Tractarian Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein famously turned his back on the logical analyst position he put forward in the *Tractatus*. After his return to Cambridge in 1929, we find him saying things like:

I do not now have phenomenological language, or “primary language” as I used to call it, in mind as my goal. I no longer hold it to be necessary. All that is possible and necessary is to separate what is essential from what is inessential in *our* language.

[1980, §1]

The great economist Piero Sraffa is often credited with showing Wittgenstein how his old aspiration of finding the logical calculus for language was a dead end, and indeed, in the Preface to the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein thanks Sraffa for this insight. Norman Malcolm corroborates Wittgenstein’s report:

One day ... when Wittgenstein was insisting that a proposition and that which it describes must have the same “logical form,” the same “logical multiplicity,” Sraffa made a gesture, familiar to Neapolitans as meaning something like disgust or contempt, of brushing the underneath of his chin with an outward sweep of the finger-tips of one hand. And he asked: “What is the logical form of *that*?”

(Malcolm 1958, 69)

Ramsey is also credited with causing the about-face. In the Preface to the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein says:

since I began to occupy myself with philosophy again, sixteen years ago, I could not but recognize grave mistakes in what I set out in that first book. I was helped to realize these mistakes—to a degree which I myself am hardly able to estimate—by the criticism which my ideas encountered from Frank Ramsey, with whom I discussed them in innumerable conversations during the last two years of his life.

[2009 [1953], 4]

I have argued at length elsewhere that Ramsey was indeed largely responsible for the shift in Wittgenstein’s work, showing him that philosophy must not be concerned with the atomic, phenomenal language, but with all of belief. I have also suggested that Ramsey would have been unhappy with the trajectory Wittgenstein then took his pragmatism, had he lived to see it.¹¹ Ramsey would have thought that Wittgenstein’s later work neglected the objective side of belief, and neglected the pursuit of the advancement of knowledge. For the later Wittgenstein retained, within a different framework, his insistence that the philosopher cannot speak to matters, for instance, of religion or ethics without talking nonsense, and he was dead set against seeking scientific explanations.

Insofar as Wittgenstein’s later work dominated certain quarters of philosophy, spilling over all the artificial barriers between analytic and non-analytic philosophy, Ramsey had a tremendous, if subterranean, effect on the trajectory of philosophy. And had Ramsey’s work in philosophy not been cut so short, analytic philosophy, of which he was such a star, would have taken a very different path. Had Ramsey lived to finish his book and take his projects further, analytic philosophy might have been of the “use” he required it to be. For Ramsey showed us, in theory and in practice, how it might have been of more use. The theory was to put forward a pragmatism on which our concepts of meaning, belief, and truth must be tied to human assertion and inquiry. The practice included the following. He devised a logic of partial belief, showing how degrees of belief can be measured by how we act, especially in betting contexts. That became the basis for decision theory. He wrote papers on the equality of income, optimal taxation, depression, “the theory of life,” and whether it is selfish for the philosopher or mathematician

not to do something that would directly improve the lot of others and the community. Two of his papers in economics were amplified by other economists after his death, who went on to win Nobel Prizes.

Ramsey showed Wittgenstein that the focus on the primary language was, in Wittgenstein's words, "self-satisfied and hence without any value" (MS 107, 247). Ramsey wanted philosophy to be of value, both in clarifying our thoughts and in advancing knowledge. His is a lesson that many philosophers, "analytic" or not, might do well to heed.

Notes

- 1 What follows is a necessarily potted history, both of the origins of analytic philosophy and of Ramsey's role in it. See Misak (2016) for something more sustained.
- 2 It had appeared in German a year earlier, under the title "Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung," in the journal *Annalen der Naturphilosophie*.
- 3 See McGuinness (1988, 298).
- 4 See the letters compiled in von Wright (1973).
- 5 See the letters collected in McGuinness (2012, 140) and von Wright (1973, 77ff).
- 6 See Proops (2011, 234f.) for a good account of the problem.
- 7 That "stuff" was to become "The Foundations of Mathematics," which used Wittgenstein's account of logic as tautology to defend a kind of logicism.
- 8 Sahlin (1990, 66) and Majer (1991, 162–3) also pressed home this point early on, and Methven (2015, ch. 4) does so more recently. Methven argues that the idea is already present in Ramsey's critical notice of the *Tractatus*.
- 9 See Misak (2004/1991, 2013, 2016).
- 10 This is from Peirce's "The Fixation of Belief", included in *Chance, Love and Logic*, and best found now at *W* 3: 253; 1877, in the *Chronological Edition* (1982–) of Peirce's writings.
- 11 Misak (2016).

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10

FROM SCIENTIFIC TO ANALYTIC

Remarks on How Logical Positivism Became a Chapter of Analytic Philosophy

Alan Richardson

Timothy Williamson (2014) has recently begun to scout the terrain of the “transformation of analytic philosophy” from a broadly but deeply anti-metaphysical project to one that embraces speculative metaphysics. The two anti-metaphysical projects of pre-reformation analytic philosophy that Williamson deploys to frame his historical puzzle are logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy. My concern is different from Williamson’s. I am interested in how logical positivism came to be a project within analytic philosophy. This is a story that predates the rise of ordinary language philosophy.¹ It takes us back to a time when British analytic philosophy was not most importantly an anti-metaphysical project. It is a story of how logical positivism was read by the first group of scholars who were denominated by the term, “analytic philosophers,” the Cambridge analysts of the 1930s (Beaney 2013, 12).

What Was Logical Positivism Before It Was Analytic?

When logical positivism was forming itself into a coherent project in Vienna, Berlin, Prague and a few other places in middle Europe in the 1920s, there was no tradition yet called “analytic philosophy” for it to belong to. Moreover, while all the logical positivists found some role in philosophy for some form of analysis—and some found the only proper method of philosophy to be logical analysis—for none of them was making philosophy analytic the final goal. It was rather the means to a substantially more important and more ambitious goal: to make philosophy properly scientific. The favored term for some of the Vienna Circle and for their compatriots in Berlin was, thus, “*wissenschaftliche Philosophie*,” scientific philosophy. While Hans Reichenbach distanced himself from positivism and favored the term (which became the more ubiquitous one for the project) “logical

empiricism,” his book, *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (Reichenbach 1951), can be taken as the emblem of the final defeat of this term—by 1951 the term had gone out of fashion even among the logical positivists and was busily being overtaken by “analytic philosophy.” Why and how the term went out of fashion is a complicated story. Here I wish to examine only one aspect of that story: the interaction between the logical positivists and the Cambridge analysts in the 1930s and the insistence among the Cambridge analysts that analysis did not fulfil the scientific ambitions the logical positivists had—and that they shared with or even learned from Bertrand Russell. A contentious but broadly correct conclusion to draw from this is that the analytic philosophy that Williamson starts from—a descendent logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy—reflects the victory of G. E. Moore’s vision of analytic philosophy over Russell’s.

I have argued for about two decades now that the central project of logical positivism in its European phase was to find a way to make philosophy participant in the intellectual and social virtues of science. Here I will provide only a few brief reminders of this central theme in logical positivist work. The *annus mirabilis* of the flowering of the scientific ambitions of logical positivism was 1928, the year of the publication of Rudolf Carnap’s *Logischer Aufbau der Welt* and Hans Reichenbach’s *Philosophie der Raum-Zeit-Lehre*. The scientific ambitions of these authors were placed right up front, providing the central theme of the prefaces of the two books. Here is a characteristic passage from Carnap’s preface (Carnap 1967 [1928], xvi):

The new type of philosophy has arisen in close contact with the work of the special sciences, especially mathematics and physics. Consequently they have taken the strict and responsible orientation of the scientific investigator as their guide for philosophical work, while the attitude of the traditional philosopher is more like that of a poet.

Much like Russell’s (1914) *Our Knowledge of the External World*, which Carnap famously cited and from which he chose the motto for the *Aufbau*, the *Aufbau* was, for Carnap, chiefly an illustration of the fruitfulness of bringing the goals and techniques of technical science—logic, mathematics—into philosophy. Throughout the preface, Carnap stresses the epistemic responsibility embedded in this move: out with mere concept poetry and in with piecemeal, painstaking responsible scientific work. Only by taking this step toward epistemic responsibility could philosophy secure its own status as a knowledge-producing project.

Hans Reichenbach also sought, in the preface to his *Philosophie der Raum-Zeit-Lehre*, to indicate how epistemology both trained and modeled upon the methods of the exact sciences can bring new insight and a new problem situation to philosophy. One can hear in this characteristic passage also Reichenbach’s proleptic rebuttal of claims to sterility or narrow-mindedness in the ways scientific philosophers pursued philosophical progress (Reichenbach 1957 [1928], xv):

Modern scientific epistemology ... justifies discoveries of such far-reaching consequences as would, in former times, have been merely empty speculation, fantasies without empirical foundation. It is characteristic of this emerging scientific trend in philosophy to emphasize the combination of detailed work with the overall comprehensiveness of the problem; whoever charges it with narrow-mindedness or sterility shows only that he confuses rigor of method with narrowness of aim.

Of course, the *locus classicus* of the call for a new scientific philosophy promoted by the Vienna Circle logical positivists (Reichenbach was in Berlin) was its 1929 *Aufruf, Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung*. In this document written by Carnap, Otto Neurath, and Hans Hahn, the Vienna Circle calls for a new philosophy fully participant in the scientific conception of the world. Such a new philosophy would bring philosophy into accord with other rationalizing projects of modern life (Stadler and Uebel 2012, 90):

We are witnessing how the spirit of the scientific world-conception penetrates in growing measure the forms of personal and public life, of education, of childrearing, of architecture, and how it helps shape economic and social life according to rational principles. *The scientific world-conception serves life, and life embraces it.*

The point was not just that philosophy seemed idle in contemporary life in Red Vienna but also that philosophy as pursued in Austrian universities was largely a counterweight to or drag upon such projects. In the diagnosis made by Carnap, metaphysical philosophy seeks to prop up irrational and unjust modes of life through stories of transcendent values that were literally incomprehensible. It was time for philosophy to align itself with progress. Despite its long history of obfuscation, by participating in the goals, methods, and regimes of epistemic responsibility of the sciences, philosophy too could be an engine of rational and social progress. This was a key argument to attempt to make in the context of Red Vienna and the Weimar Republic.

I hasten to add, if only briefly here, that as the logical positivists began to move to the USA, a number of American philosophers at the time clearly understood that scientific philosophy in this sense was what was on offer. Moreover, these American philosophers found the connection between the projects of logical positivism and their own projects in exactly that ambition. Thus, while he argued that Carnap's logical syntax and semantics of science needed to be augmented by a pragmatics of scientific language, Charles Morris, who understood himself to be speaking for a new generation of pragmatists, nevertheless took this to be a detailed disagreement within a project of what Morris called scientific empiricism (Morris 1937). In the early 1940s a then significant philosopher in the USA, Curt Ducasse, wrote a book called *Philosophy as Science* in which he argued for his own

vision of scientific philosophy against the background of the two most significant alternative views of scientific philosophy that he saw at the time: these were John Dewey's experimental philosophy and Carnap's logic of science (Ducasse 1941).

"Analytic Philosophy" and Analytic Philosophy in America

As a term of art used in the mode of self-description and endorsement, "analytic philosophy" arrived late on North American shores, but when it did arrive it was surprisingly robust. It is almost entirely a post-Second World War story in North America. The one significant use of the term "analytic philosophy" in pre-war America was in the title of Ernest Nagel's (1936) "Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe" published in the *Journal of Philosophy*. As the title indicates, Nagel uses the phrase to talk about what was happening elsewhere—in Cambridge, in Vienna, in Warsaw. To be sure, he finds affinities between this sort of philosophy and that done by, to use his phrase, "American naturalists," but he is not claiming of himself or anyone else in the US that they are "analytic philosophers." It is of interest that he thinks the Vienna Circle are analytic philosophers, since, as we have seen, that was not a term in use in Vienna in the mid-1930s either. After the war, starting around 1948, there is a veritable explosion of the use of the term "analytic philosophy" and of related terms such as "philosophical analysis" in America. American philosophers and British philosophers newly arrived on American shores start publishing anthologies on "philosophical analysis" on which those edited by Feigl and Sellars and by Max Black are only the most famous (Feigl and Sellars 1949; Black 1950a). In 1949 the first textbook with the term "analytic philosophy" appears—*Elements of Analytic Philosophy* written by Arthur Pap (Pap 1949). In 1950, Feigl and Sellars founded *Philosophical Studies*, a journal of analytic philosophy, as it said on its cover.

Now, from the standpoint of two developments this new robust usage of "analytic philosophy" in North America is pretty surprising. The two developments are: the development of logical positivism and the development of American philosophy. As already mentioned, from the point of view of logical positivism, "scientific philosophy" is the more expectable phrase. As we have seen, this sort of language is all over Carnap's work and is his ultimate Russellian inheritance—the use of logic was going to allow the subject matter and proper methods of philosophy to be well-enough defined so as to allow a new scientific philosophy of piecemeal progress through collaborative work take place in philosophy. In his own way, Hans Reichenbach endorsed both analysis (though scarcely Russellian analysis) in the form of *Erkenntnisanalyse* and scientific philosophy also right back into the 1920s. By 1930, Moritz Schlick and Friedrich Waismann had more complicated views, given their relations to Wittgenstein. Schlick did not think philosophy was a body of doctrine; it could thus scarcely be a science. But he followed Wittgenstein in thinking that philosophy was logical analysis and that so conceived this meant that the activity of philosophizing was a scientific activity,

since what was left standing under analysis was the scientific understanding of the world. At stake for the logical positivists was not simply a conception of analysis as the proper method of philosophy but that the use of logic (and not always simply analysis—think of Carnapian constructions, the development of axiom systems, explications; the term “analysis” does not live long in Carnap’s vocabulary) brought philosophy in line with the scientific world conception. So, from the point of view of the development of logical positivism the question is why were the goals of scientific philosophy, using the tools of logic, submerged and overtaken by a new discursive framework of “analytic philosophy” full stop.

From the point of view of the development of American philosophy, the rise of the language of “analytic philosophy” is usually connected to the decline and fall of pragmatism. Those who study the history of pragmatism and those who are interested in the range of projects in American philosophy circa, say, 1930 (much less 1950) have figured out that the story of a dominant American pragmatist philosophy beat back by Viennese and British imports in a sort of Sherman’s march to the sea in philosophy is not quite an adequate framework for understanding what happened in American philosophy. Although there certainly were American philosophers deeply influenced by the work of Bertrand Russell and who advocated analysis as the proper method of philosophy (and among them the most important were the New Realists), as we have already noted, the term “analytic philosophy” as a covering term to explain what they were doing and to foster intellectual cohesiveness was not on offer in the USA, even after the founding in Britain of the journal *Analysis* in 1933. So, why was a term available for at least a generation and in widespread use in English philosophy suddenly adopted as a resource in American philosophy after the Second World War?

The default answer to this question we have already set aside: it was to overcome the legacy of pragmatism, since whatever else might be true there are no analyses of concepts, at least no analyses that are not embarrassingly bad, in James or Dewey. I do not set this aside because I find it wholly false but rather because I don’t find it wholly true. Reichenbach (1939) did basically argue that Dewey was incompetent in his essay in the 1939 volume *The Philosophy of John Dewey*—and then used the occasion to declare that philosophy did not need anyone like Dewey ever again. In the specialized world of scientific philosophy, Dewey was obsolete. But Reichenbach was not endorsing analytic philosophy in 1939 in this argument but rather a form of philosophical specialization that he there as elsewhere associated with a properly functioning scientific research community.

First Contact: Logical Positivism as Read by British Analysts

In order to add some context to the question of the rise of “analytic philosophy” in the USA, I want to scout some early encounters between logical positivism and British analysis. I want, more particularly, to recover some aspects of the activities and the vision of philosophy in a group of British philosophers who as a

group are under-studied in the history of analytic philosophy. They might not be “great philosophers” but they are a lot like many professional philosophers of the past century—philosophers trying to move the philosophical project in a certain direction. One thing that distinguishes them from most philosophers is how successful they were. Among those I have in mind are Susan Stebbing and John Wisdom, Max Black, Gilbert Ryle, Norman Malcolm. As I have already mentioned, lying behind them—and this is one reason why I think we need to pay more attention to this group and its influence on the development of analytic philosophy—is a vision of philosophy that owes less to Bertrand Russell or even Ludwig Wittgenstein than to G. E. Moore.

I can do no more than sketch some characteristic views of this group and their connections to Moore. In the sketch I shall deal mainly with Stebbing and Black and confine myself to issues of the reception of logical positivism among the British analytic philosophers of the 1930s. For this purpose the first text I will turn to is the 1933 British Academy lecture by Susan Stebbing, “Logical Positivism and Analysis.”² It is an intriguing document. Stebbing’s professed topic is a comparison of Moore’s philosophical practice with the conception of analysis recently “preached” by Wittgenstein. Among the rather astonishing features of the lecture is that four years after his return to Cambridge, Wittgenstein’s current views had not seriously penetrated into Stebbing’s London philosophical life. Stebbing reasons as follows: Wittgenstein’s views in the *Tractatus* and thereafter are largely unintelligible. But he inspired the Vienna Circle. Thus, the views of the Vienna Circle about verification and analysis are our most reliable guide to what Wittgenstein was on about in the *Tractatus*. So, she enlists Schlick and Carnap as clues to Wittgenstein and ultimately rejects the sort of verificationist phenomenalism she sees in all of them by reference to Moore’s practice of philosophical analysis. Wittgenstein is a logical positivist, logical positivism is what Wittgenstein says, and the interesting thing about Wittgenstein is to test his pronouncements against the rich record of Moorean achievement. The result is a rejection of Wittgenstein strictures upon an account of analysis in favor of Moore’s practice.

I do not have the space to summarize Stebbing’s lecture. I do want to say two general things about it, one from the point of view of the history of logical positivism and one from the point of view of history of analytic philosophy. From the point of view of the history of logical positivism, it is interesting how fragmentary and how skewed her views of logical positivism are. The characteristic concerns coming from the methodology of the exact sciences animating the work of Schlick and Carnap are almost entirely absent. Schlick and Carnap appear simply as the pieceworkers stitching together the Wittgensteinian cloth, which cloth issued from the *Tractatus*. Moreover, despite being aware of the movement in Carnap’s thought, under Neurath’s influence, from an auto-psychologically-based epistemology to physicalism, Stebbing convicts all these thinkers, Wittgenstein included, of being such stringent phenomenologists as to eventually and inevitably

lapse into solipsism, despite their protestations that the thesis of solipsism is without meaning. Someone who had not read the *Aufbau*, for example, would be forgiven, upon hearing Stebbing's remarks on it, for thinking that methodological solipsism was the chief topic of the work.

From the point of view of the history of British analytic philosophy, the lecture is interesting since it shows how easy it is at once to assimilate and to resist Wittgenstein and the logical positivists among those like Stebbing who learned their conception of philosophy from Moore. Wittgenstein and the logical positivists are only interesting because their conception of philosophy sounds something like Moore's—they stress analysis, they resist systems of distinctly philosophical knowledge, they aim for clarity and precision. Yet, in some sort of vicious circle of interpretation, the verificationism of a stage in the Circle's development is read back into Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. This means both that Wittgenstein falls into phenomenalist mistakes and that any subsequent breaking free from verificationism within the Circle is not a development of their thought, but rather a repudiation of their project.

The crux of the matter occurs in Stebbing's argument that whereas Moore and Russell were as one in claiming that facts make propositions true, Wittgenstein must be read as claiming that facts only verify propositions. But only experience can play the role of a verifier, so Wittgensteinian basic facts must be facts of experience. Moreover, if all things are logical constructions from experience, then Wittgenstein is a phenomenalist and, if he is consistent, ultimately driven to a solipsism of the present moment. Moore's refutation of J. S. Mill's account of physical objects goes over directly to the case of Wittgenstein. Here are Stebbing's own words (Stebbing 1933, 86):

The point at issue could be formulated in the question whether there are *final* facts. Can we say that there are facts which make propositions true, or can we only say that propositions are verifiable by reference to my own experience? In my opinion there are final facts, and these final facts are the facts which make propositions true (or false).

You might find yourself tempted, in response to this quotation from Stebbing, wishing to say on behalf of the anti-metaphysical viewpoint of logical positivism that (Ayer 1933, 3):

The danger of relapsing into metaphysics when one talks about facts is fostered by our habit of saying that it is the facts which make propositions true or false. This is well enough as a way of expressing the truth that a proposition is not made true or false by anyone's believing it to be true or false. But we must beware of adopting an "absolutist" standpoint about these "facts." To say "F is a fact" is merely another way of saying "it is a fact that F" or "F is true" or simply "F."

This is, interestingly, the start of the second paragraph of the very first essay, published in autumn 1933, six months after Stebbing's lecture, in the new journal, co-edited by Stebbing, *Analysis*. The author of the essay is logical positivism's self-appointed spokesperson in Britain, A. J. Ayer.

You might find yourself intrigued, reading on in the paragraph that Ayer says the following next (Ayer 1933, 3):

"F is a fact" is true if in a certain situation describable in the propositions r, s, t, I would make the observations describable in the propositions p, q ... , otherwise false. And that I would in the given situation have the experience in question is what "F is a fact" means.

That is, Ayer exactly disagrees with Stebbing's claim about final the truth-making quality of facts, and commits precisely the confusion of verification with truth that she warns against, just as she speaks uncritically the language of facts that Ayer finds leading inexorably to metaphysics.

Among the questions that disagreements like this raise—disagreements about the vocabulary with which to start doing philosophy—is to what degree was there, even across people like Stebbing and Ayer, much less across Moore and Carnap, a real commonality of philosophical purpose here. Perhaps here as elsewhere the answer is not to be found in any deep joint project but in what has been excluded from the conversation from the start. The statement of policy that prefaces the first issue of the journal is useful in this regard ("A Statement ...," 1933, 2):

ANALYSIS will be mainly devoted to short discussions of questions of detail in philosophy, or of precisely defined aspects of philosophical questions. Analysis is not designed to support any particular set of conclusions. But the contributions to be published will be concerned, as a rule, with the elucidation or explanation of facts, or groups of facts, the general nature of which is, by common consent, already known; rather than with attempts to establish new kinds of fact about the world, of very wide scope, or on a very large scale. It is not contended either that there are, or that there are not, large scale facts, or facts about the world as a whole, or on the whole. There is a considerable number of philosophers a great part or the whole of whose philosophical interests is in discovering the precise constitution of particular facts or specific types of fact. To these it is hoped that Analysis will be useful, both as a source of new suggestions and as a vehicle of expression.

This statement compares interestingly to the statement of purpose that Hans Reichenbach wrote for *Erkenntnis* in 1930, which ends this way (I translate *Erkenntnis* here as knowledge, rather than the currently fashionable, cognition because (a) it means knowledge and (b) that is the only translation that gives the right sense of Reichenbach's claims) (Reichenbach 1930/1931, 3):

Because it is knowledge that we set as the goal of philosophy, knowledge in the same sense as for all the special sciences, we have chosen the word as sign for the new journal. Our journal seeks no school opinions, no excogitated systems, no concept poetry; it seeks knowledge.

Here and throughout the policy statements, we see the affinities and the differences between the projects importantly on offer. Following Moore, the editors of *Analysis* stress an anti-systems point of view in philosophy—philosophy does not aim to uncover facts that stand opposed to and correct the commonsense view of the world. Idealist philosophers, for example, need not apply. The problem is also set by Moore's account of philosophy: we philosophers, just like everyone else, including the man on the Clapham omnibus, endorse—indeed “know with certainty”—the commonsense facts of the world. (And among those facts are facts about facts, a language we speak without qualm.) We could not know these facts unless we understood what propositions expressing those facts mean. Analysis neither serves to help justify claims of problematic evidence nor to elucidate the meaning of propositions. It serves instead to clarify what we already know. When called upon to clarify clarification the analysts speak the language of facts and propositions once again—in Stebbing's terms, the analyzed proposition is closer in its expression to the final facts it ultimately expresses and that make it true. To speak in terms that are once again current in philosophy—analysis reveals the dependency of propositions upon the facts that make them true.

The main affinity here with logical positivism is not a shared conception of or sense of the virtues of analysis, but rather the anti-systems sensibility. Philosophers do not confabulate theories of the world. They analyze and make clearer what we already know. But it is notable how far the “common sense” world of facts is from the anti-metaphysical starting point for the logical empiricists. Moore, still in the grip of his idealist overcoming, insists that the principal problem with systems philosophy is that it seeks to correct or to show strictly speaking untrue the taken-for-granted truths of common sense. For the logical positivists the problem is not the theoretical impulse of philosophy but how it is discharged—metaphysical explanations are meaningless pseudo-explanations, concept poetry. The world of modern science had, through rigorous elucidation of the meanings of physical concepts, revealed a world very different from that of common sense; philosophy must learn the lessons of epistemic progress from that science.

These differences were not lost on the historical actors. Writing a few years later in *Erkenntnis* Max Black sought to explain the projects of the British analysts to a logical positivist audience. This paper, originally read at the 1938 Congress for the Unity of Science in Cambridge, framed its discussion this way (Black 1939, 24–5):

for some time in England there has been an unmistakeable climate of opinion, hostile to metaphysics and speculative philosophy, and sympathetic to analysis. English philosophers of metaphysical tendency have shivered for a long time

in a draught of glacial severity proceeding from the direction of Cambridge. For the ensuing mortality in philosophical theories one man more than any other—Professor G. E. Moore—must be held responsible.

Black then immediately contrasts Moore to Russell and says “the dogmatic basis of Moore’s method is the pronouncement of common sense, of Russell’s that of the *scientist*” (Black 1939, 26n6) and sides, on behalf of the British analysts, with Moore. That is, Black saw clearly that the logical positivists share with Russell the desire to make philosophy scientific and analysis as a means to that end, and he clearly sees that Moore has no such ambition.

In the introduction to his 1950 anthology on philosophical analysis, Black has become yet bolder, stating very clearly that Russell’s view is simply wrong (Black 1950b, 6):

By adopting the scientific method, philosophers are to learn from scientists and mathematicians how to agree; and steady calculation, guaranteed to produce an acceptable answer, is to replace philosophical disputation. If some such hope as this inspired Russell (as it certainly did the Logical Positivists, who learned so much from him) his program was a failure. The merits of his views on philosophical analysis have to be argued on *philosophical* grounds; and to baptize them as ‘scientific’ can only generate confusion.

One can see how unpersuasive this would be to, for example, Carnap. Carnap’s vision of scientific philosophy is, in its fundamental gesture, a proposal for getting philosophers to engage in research tasks modeled on those of science. The point was not, contra Black’s suggestion, to have an algorithm for achieving the truth, but rather to take responsibility for the establishment in philosophy of sufficient clarity of language and method to have any idea what we, as philosophers, are talking about and about which we might seek consensus. Carnap would no doubt wonder what Black means when he speaks of the philosophical grounds upon which the virtues of analysis are meant to be argued.³

Back to America: Interpretation and Historical Explanation

Given the facts of the explosive rise of a rather broad tent “analytic philosophy” at mid-century in the USA, it would appear that Moorean analytic philosophy won and logical positivism lost. One obvious question would be why? This question is not easy to answer. The first difficulty is that we do not typically engage in explanatory accounts of why and how some metaphysical views become persuasive when we do history of philosophy. Given the paucity of such explanatory accounts, it is hard to know what an historical explanation would actually look like. We have some world historical facts: given the war and its aftermath, in fact there were a number of technically minded Germanophone

philosophers recently arrived in the USA where they joined philosophy departments in which only some of their colleagues were ready to engage in the details of the logical techniques that they were putting to use; there was also an influx of British philosophers after the war. There seems to have been a felt need to find some commonality of project in which it made sense that precisely these projects fit together somehow.

For this project, the Black line was more promising than Carnapian scientific philosophy trained on the details of mathematical logic, precisely because not everyone was doing anything like what Carnap was doing, whereas you could, perhaps, wring some insight from Carnap's projects even if you resolutely failed to engage in its technical details. Carnap himself was often found not defending his own projects so much as deploying his principle of tolerance to say that of course Peter Strawson could engage in his own projects and Quine could engage in his. But to speak in a Kuhnian idiom for a moment, to make that concession is to deny your own projects paradigmatic status and thus to fail to institute a community of technical scientific philosophers who, in the vision of Russell, would find in the question of competence in formal logic finally a way to separate the philosophical sheep from the goats. This sort of ecumenism will lead in the typical case, and has led in the case of American philosophy, to a fragmentation of the field by topic, method, tools, and goal—a different form of specialization from the one Reichenbach was arguing for.

But perhaps our question is not quite the right one. For, while the broad tent of analytic philosophy might have won out over the logical positivist vision of scientific philosophy, two complications remain. First, the broad tent did not typically maintain its explicitly Moorean roots. The very fragmentation noted above has led to projects that have diverged as much from Moore's "common sense" as they have from the details of logical positivism. The typical analytic metaphysician of the 1970s, while he may have been allowed to flourish in an ecumenical atmosphere pushed by those inspired by Moore, did not feel compelled to check the extravagances of their philosophical universes against common sense. Indeed, as has at times been noted, several branches of analytic philosophy stopped being based in analysis pretty quickly. The rhetorical victory of Moorean analysis contained within it the seeds of its own forgetting.

Second, it is surely not the case that the logical positivist or the Russellian visions of scientific philosophy stopped being important when they stopped being the framework within which those projects went forward. A number of central areas of philosophical work used logical techniques and placed logic at the centre of their methodological attention. Semantics and related areas in philosophy of science, philosophy of language, and metaphysics to this day require a fairly sophisticated understanding of metalogical results and techniques. Other areas, such as formal epistemology sometimes deploy techniques from logic and sometimes from other formal areas (decision theory, game theory). The logical positivist vision of the technical scientific philosopher has surely not disappeared without

remainder. Indeed, part of the deep fragmentation of late analytic philosophy stems from there being embedded in that project no coherent vision of what a philosopher is and what she should know in order to do her work. We have learned that the best way to forestall a crisis of method is to stop talking broadly about method. (Experimental philosophy is stirring the methodological hornet's nest by discovering that Moorean intuitions are actually learned in philosophy classrooms (if no longer always the common rooms of Cambridge) and are not independent quasi-empirical checks on philosophical theorizing. No historian of analytic philosophy should find that surprising.)

One final complication that I have not confronted head-on is the widespread sense that within the American context the drive toward scientific philosophy was, after the Carnap–Quine arguments over analyticity, absorbed into naturalism of a distinctly Quinean variety. I wish to say only a couple of things. First, it is not true that this was the only strand of scientific philosophy pursued in America. For example, Richard Jeffrey and others working in the more technical areas of formal epistemology and inductive logic continued to build from Carnap's work and seem, by and large, to have imbibed less of a naturalistic spirit from Quine than an engineering spirit from Carnap.⁴ Second, our attention to the emergence of "analytic philosophy" in the USA at precisely the moment of Quine's arguments against Carnap suggests a different reading of the central arguments of Quine's moves toward pragmatism in "Two Dogmas": instead of reading them as demanding a fully technical, scientific, and naturalized philosophy, Quine's "continuity of philosophy and science" suggests instead an argument that precisely aids the formation of broad-tent "analytic philosophy." That is, he can be read as arguing that the relations between science and philosophy are loose enough that both technical projects like Carnap's and "common sense" projects like Austin's or Strawson's have a place. In fact, it is often forgotten now, after the development of Quine's mature philosophy, that "naturalism" does not appear in "Two Dogmas." "Common sense" however does appear and makes its appearance crucially in a place where it specifically covers over the difference between scientific philosophy and common sense philosophy that Black insisted upon (Quine 1963, 45): "Science is a continuation of common sense, and it continues the common-sense expedient of swelling ontology to simplify theory." This is not science as Carnap understood it (his interest in science was not primarily in its ontological postulations) nor common sense as Moore understood it (his interest in common sense was not to contrast its ontology with that of unalloyed sensation).

One might take this a step further and say that both argumentatively and stylistically Quine was the philosopher called forth by the emerging project of analytic philosophy. While fully conversant in the technical details of logic (and dependent argumentatively at points upon those details), Quine's most important essays deploy informal arguments against technical projects such as Carnap's. Thus, while sharing both technical competence and even scientific ambition with the logical positivists, the effect of Quine's arguments was to lessen the grip of the

technical disciplines on the practice of analytic philosophy and to make room for alternative philosophical ambitions. Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" found in the emerging consensus upon broad-tent analytic philosophy its perfect setting; in turn his arguments further solidified that consensus. With Quine all philosophical differences within the analytic camp became differences of degree of ontological extravagance and a bright thread of continuity was drawn through common sense, philosophy, and science.

Notes

- 1 Ordinary language philosophy is not easily dated. To the best of my knowledge, the earliest essay to suggest the virtue of making a linguistic turn from Moore's "common sense" to "ordinary language" is Malcolm (1942).
- 2 Three important essays on Stebbing's work in this time period are Beaney (2003, 2016) and Milkov (2003). Beaney's essays explicate Stebbing's notion of analysis developed in a number of essays to a far greater degree than I do here and I am much indebted to them. I lack the space properly to elaborate on the differences between my reading of Stebbing and Beaney's recent exploration. Milkov's essay concentrates on Stebbing's 1933 essay, as I do, but his main project is to draw a distinction between Frege/Russell/Moorean analysis and Wittgensteinian analysis. My goal is different—it is to draw attention to how incomprehensible the logical positivist project looks to those whose vision of analysis derives most particularly from Moore.
- 3 In saying this I believe I am disagreeing with the ultimate lesson of Beaney (2003). Beaney ends with a point strikingly similar to Black's: "appreciation of the debate [between British philosophy and logical positivism—AR] reveals just how much methods of analysis depend on deep philosophical assumptions" (Beaney 2003, 349). That view begs the question against one side in the debate by positing that there are assumptions properly called philosophical that are in place prior to commitment to analytic methods. Logical positivist analytic methods were borrowed from, so they believed, the practice of the sciences. Philosophy is not quicksand; it is possible to escape.
- 4 A recent exploration of this can be found in French (2015).

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11

ERNEST NAGEL'S NATURALISM

A Microhistory of the American Reception of Logical Empiricism

Christopher Pincock

Ernest Nagel, then, is a remarkably wide-ranging analytical philosopher, who has combined logical power and scientific learning in his admirable effort to formulate principles that should guide rational inquiry and rational living.

Morgenbesser, Suppes, and White (1969, v)

I

Ernest Nagel (1901–1985) stands out as one of the earliest and most successful American advocates of a broadly logical empiricist philosophy of science. His magnum opus *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (1961) offers what turned out to be a compelling model of analytic philosophy of science. This work embodies one set of ideals for the analytic philosopher: modest, engaged with the details of science, and displaying technical mastery of logic and mathematics. It is thus fruitful to consider how and why Nagel adopted this approach to the philosophy of science. An examination of Nagel's case has no immediate implications for the broader question of how analytic philosophy fashioned its self-image in the 1950s and 1960s, for it turns out that Nagel's situation was far from typical of American philosophers in this period. At the same time, Nagel's proposed "contextualistic naturalism" (Nagel 1956, xviii, Nagel 1954, 54) can inform such a broader history of analytic philosophy.¹ For it appears that prior support for naturalism in some form helped logical empiricist commitments to find a foothold in the United States. Debates about naturalism permeate American philosophy throughout the critical formative period of analytic philosophy (Eldridge 2004, Jewett 2011). If we can see how naturalistic commitments served to shape the self-image of analytic philosophers, then we will have a better understanding of what this movement in philosophy might amount to.

In this essay I argue that Nagel's adoption of logical empiricist commitments was motivated by a problem at the heart of his naturalism. This is the problem of the metaphysical basis of logic. Nagel eventually argued that only a view of logic that freed itself from metaphysical commitments was consistent with a thoroughgoing naturalism. By these means he tried to offer a compelling philosophical position that would undergird his more piecemeal investigations into science. This form of naturalism aimed to sustain a vision of the philosophy of science that assigned a legitimate place to both the natural and social sciences as well as ethical and political values.²

II

Nagel was born in Bohemia, then in Austria-Hungary, in 1901, but his family emigrated to the United States in 1911.³ His philosophical outlook was shaped early on through his studies at the City College of New York with Morris R. Cohen (1880–1947). Nagel graduated from City College in 1923 and began an extended graduate study at Columbia, which culminated in a PhD dissertation “On the logic of measurement” (Nagel 1930).⁴ In his dissertation Nagel thanks John Dewey (1859–1952) for “a basis for whatever philosophy I can call my own” (Nagel 1930, iii).⁵ As we will see, Nagel's work often tries to negotiate the conflicts between Cohen and Dewey.⁶ Nagel secured employment as an instructor at Columbia in 1930. He stayed there for the rest of his career, except for a few brief interludes.⁷ Nagel's trip to Europe in 1934/5 (as a Guggenheim fellow) is especially important for our discussion as it was during this time that he met the most prominent logical empiricists. His extended report, “Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe,” published in two parts in the *Journal of Philosophy* in 1936, represents one of the earliest attempts to characterize analytic philosophy as a movement (Nagel 1956, 191–246).

Nagel agreed with both Cohen and Dewey that logic was properly conceived as the broad study of the appropriate tools for rational inquiry, including the discussion of scientific methods for evaluating evidence. As Nagel put it in the 1934 textbook *An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method*, co-authored with Cohen, “Logic may be said to be concerned with the question of the adequacy or probative value of different kinds of evidence” (Cohen and Nagel 1934, 5).⁸ Formal logic and the study of deductive proof are important parts of logic, but they should by no means exhaust the attention of the logician. An urgent question for this approach to logic is to determine how it is that logical statements (like the law of excluded middle) or principles of inference (like modus ponens) constrain our evaluation of evidence. Until the mid-1930s Nagel was content with the account of logic that he sketched in his book with Cohen. A succinct statement of this view is that logic is tied to the modal character of things: “the norm or correctness of logic is based on the possibilities in the nature of things which are the objects of our discourse” (Cohen and Nagel 1934, 17). The things in

question are not merely the actual things found through empirical investigation, but also non-actual things. A claim such as “metals conduct electricity” is not just about actually existing metals but also pertains to metals that could exist. More generally, “whatever actually exists is only one of an indefinite number of possibilities. The actual is a flying moment passing from the future which is not yet to the past which no longer is” (Cohen and Nagel 1934, 21). This suggests some kind of realism about the non-actual, be it merely possible metals or metals beyond the present.

Nagel’s early approach to the nature of logic raises a number of questions for a naturalist. Nagel’s naturalism was announced in his dissertation, and remained a constant element of his approach to logic and the philosophy of science. In its initial form it embraced three commitments:

their common conviction [1] that reflective inquiry may discover the order of the birth and decay of things; [2] that thought and ideal forms have physical efficacy only in virtue of the operations of matter of which they are expressions; and [3] that the ideals of life must be based upon the satisfactions achievable in a material world.

(Nagel 1930, ii, numbering added)

On the metaphysical side, Nagel proposed that the findings of science indicated that the natural world, made up of ordinary things like chairs and people, is all that exists. He also aimed to place scientific methods of testing and validation at the heart of any account of genuine knowledge. It is hard to see how this sort of naturalism can make sense of logic as the study of the natures of actual and merely possible things. The implicit modal realism of the 1934 position seems to flatly contradict metaphysical naturalism. Also, our knowledge of the truths of logic does not appear to be the sort of thing that scientific methods could validate. Indeed, as Nagel sometimes argued at this time, scientific methods take logic for granted, and so they would have trouble legitimating our knowledge of logic.

Cohen appears not to have been troubled by the tensions between naturalism and his conception of logic as he happily embraced a non-naturalist metaphysics and epistemology. His 1930 “Faith of a Logician” offers a frank defense of “logical realism” (Cohen 1949, 9). Cohen rejected a Millian empiricism about logic as “Experience alone cannot prove the absolute impossibility of things that have not as yet occurred” (Cohen 1949, 9). Here Cohen cites the irrationality of the square root of 2 and pi. More generally, “since all proof rests on assumption, it is vain for philosophy to pretend to prove all its material assumptions” (Cohen 1949, 10). This dependence undermines not only Mill’s empiricism but also rationalism and Kantian idealism, for according to Cohen these philosophies try to justify all substantial claims without recognizing their necessary presuppositions. Cohen endorsed what he called “the principle of polarity” that says there is a “necessary opposition in all determinate effects” (Cohen 1949, 12). For logic this

meant that even though logic reflects the “formal relations” of all things, there is a material element that eludes logical determination: “The world may be said to contain an irrational element in the sense that all form is the form of something which cannot be reduced to form alone” (Cohen 1949, 11).

Despite Cohen's interest in logic, mathematics and science, one can sympathize with Nagel's search for an alternative grounding of this modal approach to logic. In his early publications Nagel maintained that logic did presuppose some meta-physical claims but remained open to various ways of carrying out this grounding. One forum that led Nagel to present his views is a remarkably sharp exchange with Dewey in 1929. Nagel's “Intuition, Consistency, and the Excluded Middle” begins as a review of Becker's *Mathematical Existence* and the third edition of Fraenkel's set theory textbook (Nagel 1929a). Nagel assails phenomenological approaches for failing to address the basic issue: “A philosophy which sanctions the a priori in its usual forms leaves the connection between material and formal logic unexplained, and too often makes a confusing puzzle of the applicability and application of logic to existence” (Nagel 1929a, 482).⁹ Nagel also criticizes a regress argument that is reminiscent of Cohen's discussion of logic. Drawing on Peirce, Nagel contends that this argument involves a “confusion of logical priority and temporal antecedence” (Nagel 1929a, 482). We may conceive of the initial application of logical principles as “habits of thought” that are without legitimacy (Nagel 1929a, 483). Over time, we can abstract out workable general principles that seem to serve well in the reliable production of knowledge. Nagel thus embraced a kind of fallibilism about logic that he took to be the required cost of making sense of the application of logic to concrete or “material” reality: “the most rigorous proof yet devised may turn out to be leaky” (Nagel 1929a, 483). He was happy to extend this approach to contentious claims like the law of excluded middle. It is a genuine claim about reality that could turn out to be false. Part of Nagel's qualified defense of the law of excluded middle is to emphasize the role of the context in making its application definite. Although “every case of disjunction is conditional upon the context” (Nagel 1929a, 487), whenever a determinate context is given, and where it makes sense to apply the predicate, the predicate either does or does not apply to the subject.

Dewey objected forcefully to Nagel's application of the law of excluded middle to claims about the future. Nagel (writing in 1929) said that it is true that Hoover either will or will not be President in 1930, once one applies the appropriate qualifications. One such qualification is that Hoover is still alive in 1930. Nagel concluded

It is possible, therefore, to enumerate exhaustive (though very general) properties about the future, if that future is not altogether independent of the character of the present, or of any particular time – a condition which indeed is the condition for intelligible discourse about it.

(Nagel 1929a, 488)

Dewey responded that Nagel was confused about the formal character of logic: “If – as I believe – the principles, since they are purely formal, are applicable only to formal or non-existential subject-matter, confusion is bound to result when they are directly applied as criteria or rules in a philosophy of physical or existential affairs” (Dewey 1929, 701). There is a clear contrast between “conditions of existence” and “conditions of effective inquiry about existence” (Dewey 1929, 705). Logic, as formal, relates only to the latter, and the results of applying logical and mathematical reasoning cannot be taken to hold of material existent things without further investigation. As an example of this Dewey notes the irrationality of pi: “the conclusion has no existential applicability until we are shown, by empirical evidence, that there are existences” of that exact sort (Dewey 1929, 704). Analogously, we cannot apply the law of excluded middle until we have assured ourselves that this formal principle applies to that domain of existence. In sum, we cannot assume “that logical and formal principles have a direct material and ontological application” (Dewey 1929, 703).

Nagel responded to Dewey in a short note “Can Logic Be Divorced From Ontology?” (Nagel 1929b). Nagel’s answer is a clear “no.” The key argument that Nagel offers for this conclusion assumes naturalism: “For one who is committed to a whole-hearted naturalism, the continuity between logic and metaphysics can not be broken” (Nagel 1929b, 708). Nagel takes Dewey to be such a naturalist, and this commits Dewey to the claim that we can know some “generic traits of existence” as well as “irreducible traits in every subject-matter of scientific inquiry” (Nagel 1929b, 706). This means that we must be able to draw conclusions about the world itself based on our investigations into the world. Nagel complains that Dewey’s separation of logic and ontology would preclude this extrapolation:

if logical traits are cut off from ontological traits, so that the former have no prototype in the latter, Professor Dewey’s belief that the precarious and stable are exhibited, not only in the human foreground, but as outstanding features of nature throughout, is untenable.

(Nagel 1929b, 707)

At the same time, Nagel admits that he does not know how “to exhibit that connection [between logic and ontology] in detail” (Nagel 1929b, 709).¹⁰

We see, then, that the puzzle of how to reconcile a robust account of the nature of logic and its link to ontology, consistent with some form of naturalism, was prominent in Nagel’s thinking in 1929. As late as 1935, we still see Nagel struggling with the options for dealing with this set of commitments. In “Notes Towards a Naturalistic Conception of Logic” (Nagel 1956, 39–54), Nagel announces the strategy that would eventually allow him to remove the dependence of logic on metaphysics. The main innovation is to deepen the contextual or operational approach hinted at in the 1929 discussion:

A clear recognition that all analysis and all judgments of importance are contextual, that distinctions and traits are distinctions and traits within denotatively fixed subject matter, that the extrapolation of one analysis to other situations must be attended by caution if dislocations of meaning are not to result, are important services which a thoroughgoing naturalism can render.

(Nagel 1956, 41)

Nagel had deployed this approach to measurement to conclude that talk of length or temperature independently of the operations of measurement is illegitimate. Now he suggests the same approach is needed for logic. What is needed is “a systematic procedural analysis of both logic and mathematics” that is currently “but a hope” (Nagel 1956, 50).

III

Nagel announced his mature position in the philosophy of logic in the 1944 paper “Logic Without Ontology” (Nagel 1956, 55–92).¹¹ The contrast with the 1929 debate with Dewey is stark. For, as the title of the article suggests, Nagel has now decided that a naturalist must divorce logic from any ontological pre-suppositions. The argument for this conclusion depends on an honest “operational analysis of formal concepts” (Nagel 1956, 73). This reveals that the function of logical and mathematical symbols is not to reflect matters of fact, but to impose a kind of order on our scientific thinking:

Various norms or ideals – such as the desire for a certain degree of precision, for intellectual economy and notational convenience, or for a certain type of comprehensiveness – also control the direction of inquiry and the articulation of theories. Many symbolic constructions and operations are therefore indices of the standards regulating the course of systematic investigations, and are not merely indications of the expected conclusions of experiment or of the intrinsic relations between phases of subject matter.

(Nagel 1956, 72)

Neither a simplistic empiricism nor a metaphysical grounding of logic is appropriate as both obscure this organizational function of logical norms.

When it comes to logical principles, Nagel thinks he has found what their function is in our investigations. A “principle of noncontradiction” is adopted to prescribe a reform of the actual use of language in order to make it more precise (Nagel 1956, 74). This “regulative function” does not reflect any underlying character of things in the world. It is instead justified by the aim of “effective communication” (Nagel 1956, 74) in scientific contexts. Similar points apply to logical rules of inference such as *modus ponens*: “The explicit formulation of

canons of inference ... help to fix usages where they have previously been unsettled: they serve as *proposals* for modifying old usages and instituting new ones" (Nagel 1956, 76). Nagel takes the justification of these proposals to be exclusively a matter of helping scientists to achieve their desired ends. This means that the question of which logic is to be adopted is not solved by arbitrary means, but by considering "the adequacy of the proposed changes as means or instruments for attaining the envisaged ends" (Nagel 1956, 77).

Nagel extends this approach to mathematics as well, at least in connection with the use of irrational numbers in measurement. He focuses on the claim that an object is the square root of two feet long (Nagel 1956, 87). As we have seen, both Cohen and Dewey use statements of this sort to bolster their views on the nature of logic. Nagel claims that there is no simple relationship between the mathematical entity and the object that renders such statements true. Instead, there is an elaborate process of testing that would lead us to assert or reject such a claim: "the irrational numbers become excellent and practically indispensable means for indicating in a compact way the values obtained in an indefinite series of experimental determinations" (Nagel 1956, 91). A length claim of this sort is not only an allusion to a series of past measurements but also involves taking a position on what will be measured in the future. Allowing such measurements into our science, then, is a decision that is justified by the broader aims of our inquiry. It does not require any commitments about precise lengths in the world, but only the practical point that this policy will best serve the aims of science.

In divorcing logic from ontology, Nagel has moved much closer to Dewey's 1929 position. Still, from Nagel's perspective, his approach is superior to Dewey's approach as Nagel now has a way of addressing the earlier objection to Dewey. Recall that Nagel had worried that Dewey was unable to use logic to find out truths about the real world, including the truths needed to sustain Dewey's naturalism. Nagel's focus on the aims of scientific inquiry allows him to bypass this problem. The justification of a logical principle turns on its ability to aid scientists in finding out truths about the actual world. So we may adjust our logical commitments with this concrete aim in mind. There is no distinction between the objects of inquiry and the objects in the world, and thus no gulf between what logic helps us to believe and what we should believe about the world. Nagel can allow that scientists do discover particular facts and general patterns that obtain in the objective, mind-independent world.

It seems that Nagel hoped to bring Dewey around to his position. In 1944 Dewey, Hook, and Nagel co-authored a spirited defense of naturalism, "Are Naturalists Materialists?" (Nagel 1956, 19–38). This shows that Nagel had no qualms about identifying his naturalism with Dewey's naturalism. In print, Nagel expressed hopes for Dewey's 1938 *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. His short notice from 1939 concludes that "Those who read it must acquire courage and inspiration to contribute their share toward completing the fundamental task which Professor Dewey has envisaged with such startling clarity and adequacy" (Nagel 1939, 581).

But the task in question mainly involved clarifying several “obscure” (Nagel 1939, 580) aspects of Dewey’s discussion, including the question of how different kinds of general claims function in scientific discourse. For his part, Dewey seemed unimpressed with Nagel’s views. In a letter to Bentley from 1939, Dewey complained that Nagel “was brought up philosophically by Morris Cohen who gave an ontological, ‘realistic’ interpretation to all basic logical ideas and I think reaction from that has carried him further towards formalism than he will stand by in further development” (Hickman 2008, 1939.02.05 (08610)).¹²

Whatever their alliances, then, Nagel’s contextualist naturalism involves a distinctive conception of logic that marks a break with Dewey’s naturalism. Nagel’s attempt to divorce logic from ontology prompted a number of replies, including the extended 1949 *Philosophical Review* exchange with Everett J. Nelson and Everett Hall (Nagel 1956, 93–102).¹³ Nelson offered a variant on the presupposition argument that we have seen in Cohen: to explain how logic is an effective instrument, one must see how it reflects the underlying “categories” of reality, and so our knowledge of these categories is presupposed in scientific inquiry. Hall launched a more general complaint that any account of the character of logic involved some metaphysical claims about reality. This meant that it was fruitless to try to completely separate logic from metaphysics. Nagel complained that Nelson’s attempt to offer a metaphysical explanation of logic’s success was poorly motivated. It was just not clear how a metaphysical foundation of logic could help to solve any of the open questions about logical principles. In his response to Hall Nagel pointed out that his target was “speculative ontology” (Nagel 1956, 101) and not the ordinary claims about humans and what facilitates their communication.¹⁴

IV

By the 1950s Nagel had achieved a prominent status in American philosophy.¹⁵ A significant sign of this prestige is his December 1954 presidential address to the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association. His title was “Naturalism Reconsidered” (Nagel 1956, 3–18). This address is arguably the first by a philosopher who conceived of himself as an analytic philosopher.¹⁶ Nagel begins by apologizing for taking up such a well-worn topic as naturalism. He goes on to clarify that his naturalism is not a grand system or “basic ground plan of the cosmos” (Nagel 1956, 4). Instead, Nagel’s naturalism is the result of paying attention to the wide variety of things in the world that science has drawn attention to. He notes that this modest approach has led to some concerns:

Some of us, I know, are distressed by the widespread scepticism of traditional claims for a *philosophia perennis*, and have dismissed as utterly trivial most if not all the products of various current forms of analytical philosophy. I do not share this distress, nor do I think the dismissal is uniformly perspicuous

and warranted. For in my judgment, the scepticism which many deplore is well founded. Even though a fair-sized portion of recent analytical literature seems inconsequential also to me, analytical philosophy in our own day is the continuation of a major philosophic tradition and can count substantial feats of clarification among its assets. Concentrating on limited and determinate problems has yielded valuable fruits, not least in the form of an increased and refreshing sensitivity to the demands of responsible discourse.

(Nagel 1956, 4–5)

This tradition is naturalism and the chief selling point of analytic philosophy as Nagel frames it is the possibility of an internally coherent naturalism. As one might now expect, a crucial element of Nagel's naturalism is the separation of logic from metaphysics.

Nagel singles out two claims for his naturalism before he turns to a consideration of logic. First, Nagel accepts “the existential and causal primacy of organized matter in the executive order of nature” (Nagel 1956, 7). However, equally important for Nagel is the view that “the manifest plurality and variety of things, of their qualities and their functions, are an irreducible feature of the cosmos” (Nagel 1956, 7). They are irreducible because they cannot be explained away in any deeper, metaphysical way. Both claims are said to arise from a reflection on the way science works when it generates knowledge. Humans find a place in nature by being organized material beings. But Nagel's pluralism allows him to recognize many features of human life, including human values, as irreducible objects of scientific investigation. For example, a “naturalistic moral theory” (Nagel 1956, 11) is possible that will be based on the capacities and aims of living humans, and that can be supported by scientific investigations of the usual sort. More generally, to decide which problems to resolve, one must first find out which evils are remediable (Nagel 1956, 17). Science is thus a central part of any quest for moral and political improvement.

After laying out this version of naturalism Nagel considers “two repeatedly voiced objections which, if valid, would in my opinion seriously jeopardize the integrity and adequacy of naturalism as a philosophy” (Nagel 1956, 13). The first objection concerns the “logico-empirical method of modern science” (Nagel 1956, 13). If this is the only method that the naturalist will deploy, it seems that he is assuming in advance that the world works in a certain way. The main naturalist commitments seem to follow automatically from a restriction to scientific methods of belief formation. In his reply to this objection Nagel insists that scientific methods do not presuppose the truth or falsity of any substantial claims. Claims about the transempirical or the divine are legitimate as long as they make some contact with the material order. Reported experiences of divine illumination, for example, should be accepted as genuine experiences in line with the ordinary standards of psychological investigation. But Nagel insists that additional scientific scrutiny is needed to determine what these reports are reports of. All aspects of

the world and our experience of it are legitimate objects of scientific investigation. In this way, Nagel hopes to leave open any potentially legitimate claim about how the world is.

The second objection focuses more directly on logic itself:

in committing itself to the logic of scientific proof, it [naturalism] is quite analogous to religious belief in resting on unsupported and indemonstrable faith. For that logic allegedly involves assumptions like the uniformity of nature or similar principles which transcend experience, cannot be justified empirically, and yet provide the premises that constitute the ultimate warrant for the conclusions of empirical inquiry.

(Nagel 1956, 15)

Here we see an elegant presentation of the central tension between a metaphysical view of logic and naturalism. Nagel admits that if there are any significant claims about the world bound up with the use of logic in science, then a system of scientific beliefs must rest on these presupposed claims. But if these claims are taken for granted, then naturalism itself is just as much a matter of faith as the religious and metaphysical systems that it opposes.

It is precisely here that Nagel's shift on the nature of logic proves critical. For he is now well positioned to deny that any substantial claims about the world are assumed when one proposes a logical system to govern scientific reasoning. Nagel rejects any global attempt to link scientific methods to some assumption concerning the uniformity of nature. Instead, science is said to proceed in a piecemeal fashion, by gradually establishing limited results in special domains. The basis for any particular choice here is the track record of those methods in similar investigations: one can appeal to "the contingent historical fact that the special ways employed in obtaining and appraising the evidence have been generally effective in yielding reliable knowledge" (Nagel 1956, 15). This fallibilism about logic and logic's lack of presuppositions allows Nagel to escape the charge of blind faith: "in adopting scientific method as the instrument for evaluating claims to knowledge, naturalists are not subscribing to an indemonstrable faith" (Nagel 1956, 16). Logic is an instrument that is chosen to clarify and improve our science, and this choice can be justified independently of any presupposed claims about the natural world.

Nagel's presidential address offers, then, a conception of analytic philosophy that has at its core a defensible naturalism. Naturalism's perceived vulnerability is its reliance on logic and scientific method. But in Nagel's hands, logic itself is justified by its track record and promise of improving the scientific investigation of nature, broadly construed. Nagel's *Structure of Science* is the most sustained product of this approach to philosophy. There are few explicit discussions of logic in the book, and this may have obscured Nagel's intended vision for the philosophy of science. Nagel suggests that logical and mathematical claims are true in virtue of the meanings of the words that express the claim (Nagel 1961, 16, 38).

However, he is often at pains to emphasize the vagueness of ordinary language, including the meanings of logical terms and central terms like “explanation” and “laws.” Nagel’s consistently deployed method of argument is the functional approach that we have seen already. One starts by identifying the point of a given honorific like “explanation” and only then fashions a precise account of what that term should apply to. For Nagel, the point of having scientific explanations is to organize and extend scientific knowledge, where that knowledge is focused on the prediction and control of observable phenomena: “the sciences seek to discover and formulate in general terms the conditions under which events of various sorts occur, the statements of such determining conditions being the explanations of the corresponding happenings” (Nagel 1961, 4). This leads Nagel to defend a covering law approach to explanation, where theoretical laws are used to explain empirical laws and empirical laws in turn explain events via deductive and inductively strong arguments.

Both principles of Nagel’s naturalism play a central role in his discussion. First, Nagel continues to maintain that the matter studied in physics plays an essential role in the existence of things and their causal interactions. That is, for something to exist, it must be material, and only physical events cause other physical events. Second, Nagel’s pluralism persists about how the world of things, people, values, and so on all fit together. When it comes to laws, in particular, there are many kinds of scientific laws and so many kinds of corresponding explanations: “not all laws of nature are causal” (Nagel 1961, 75). So, Nagel’s naturalism does not collapse into what is now known as reductive physicalism. He can allow the legitimate and informative scientific investigation of social phenomena and even domains such as ethical, political, and aesthetic values.

Sarkar has recently provided a thorough critical review of Nagel’s account of reduction (Sarkar 2015). He emphasizes the non-formal conditions that Nagel imposed on scientifically valuable reductions. One of these conditions is that the reduction should help to improve the theory being reduced. Sarkar concludes: “There is thus no question of the reducing theory replacing or eliminating the reduced one – eliminativism is against both the spirit and the letter of Nagel’s analysis” (Sarkar 2015, 52). As Nagel puts it, “the reduction of one science to a second ... does not wipe out or transform into something insubstantial or ‘merely apparent’ the distinctions and types of behavior which the secondary discipline recognizes” (Nagel 1961, 366). The mereological decomposition of all wholes into their physical parts does nothing to displace a theory of those wholes. This is partly because not all explanations are causal explanations. An additional point in favor of theories of wholes is that these theories may afford laws concerning systematic dependencies that are unavailable if one appeals only to their parts.¹⁷

Jaegwon Kim misses this aspect of Nagel in his discussion of naturalism in the retrospective essay “The American Origins of Naturalism” (Kim 2003). Kim aims to present naturalism as the central preoccupation of analytic philosophy: “naturalism as the ruling ideology of analytic philosophy has helped to shape its problems during

the second half of the twentieth century” (Kim 2003, 96, emphasis added).¹⁸ He puts primary emphasis on the “primacy of organized matter”. This leads Kim to interpret Nagel’s pluralism as merely the rejection of “speculative metaphysical systems (e.g. Hegel’s) that attempt to give a sweeping account of all phenomena” (Kim 2003, 90). Nagel would surely reject this sort of metaphysical approach if it tried to force all scientific explanations into one form. This rigid approach would undermine the point of the quest for scientific explanation. But when Kim concludes that “in the current context we can set aside worries of this kind” (Kim 2003, 90), he is illustrating the gap between analytic philosophy in 1961 and in 2003. For in 1961 it was clear that a reductive physicalism that posited causal explanations for every phenomenon of interest would also be viewed as a sweeping metaphysical system. Nagel’s naturalism does not countenance such a dogmatic assumption, and I take it Nagel would be puzzled by the thought that the first component of his naturalism undermined the second. Kim has of course offered many arguments to the effect that any non-reductive physicalism collapses, in spite of its intentions, into reductive physicalism. It would be a delicate matter to determine how Nagel could best respond to these arguments and whether or not this response is compelling.

V

The distinctively logical empiricist commitment at the heart of Nagel’s philosophy of science is the claim that we should set up our logic and mathematics so that it provides the best sort of assistance to the primary scientific task of predicting and controlling observable events. Nagel is thus highly influenced by Carnap’s mature philosophy of logic, especially his principle of tolerance as first enunciated in 1934’s *Logical Syntax of Language* and the account of linguistic frameworks in “Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology.” But Nagel adopted these commitments in order to resolve an issue at the heart of his naturalism, and we have seen how this problem arose prior to Nagel’s contacts with Carnap and the other logical empiricists.¹⁹ Other American philosophers took other routes forward and either abandoned any pretense of naturalism or fashioned a form of naturalism that was considerably less contextual and pluralistic than Nagel’s. Quine’s naturalism is the most prominent example of this, and the conflict between Carnap and Quine can now seem to exhaust the range of options available. Our discussion of Nagel’s naturalism shows that there are other alternatives that remain relatively unexplored and that the scope for what could count as analytic philosophy is considerably wider than is often realized.

Notes

- 1 Nagel’s position was also called “critical naturalism” (Morgenbesser, Suppes, and White 1969, v).

- 2 See Richardson 2008 for a helpful overview of these developments. I take my discussion of Nagel to complement the reconstruction found in Reisch 2005.
- 3 These biographical details are mostly drawn from Juffras 2003.
- 4 Nagel's PhD was awarded in 1931, but a number of privately printed copies of his dissertation were produced in 1930.
- 5 It does not appear that Dewey was Nagel's official supervisor as Dewey became emeritus professor in 1930. Woodbridge is also thanked by Nagel in his introduction.
- 6 See, for example, Costello 1932, 470 and Suppes 1994, 259.
- 7 In 1959–60 Nagel was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences, where much of the final drafting of *Structure* was completed.
- 8 Compare Nagel 1956, ix, 52. Hollinger notes that the 1934 textbook was "predominantly Nagel's work" (Hollinger 1975, 158, 162, fn. 14).
- 9 Even at this early stage of his career, Nagel did not shy away from harsh criticism of his opponents, going as far as to complain of "all the Nelsons who ... reveal themselves as pathetic dictators to the tides of scientific progress" (Nagel 1929a, 482). Nelson had tried to defend the Euclidean character of perceptual space.
- 10 Most of 1929a and 1929b appear as chapter V of Nagel's dissertation (Nagel 1930). In new material added at pages 87–9 Nagel repeats his basic worry: "But does it follow that because a universal does not exist *by itself*, it does not exist *at all*, apart from the abstractive process?" (Nagel 1930, 89). Nagel did clarify the point about the law of excluded middle and the future by changing "exhaustive (though very general) properties" (Nagel 1929a, 488) to "exhaustive formal properties" (Nagel 1930, 90).
- 11 See also Nagel 1938a and 1938b.
- 12 See also Hickman 2008, 1939.03.05 (08613). See Nagel 1954, 101–49, Suppes 1969 and Nagel 1981 for some of Nagel's later discussions of Dewey's *Logic*. In 1981 Nagel returns to the original discovery problem from 1929a (xxii), while also complaining that Dewey never clarified the necessity that was said to unite the terms of a universal proposition. As a result, "the grounds for his criticism of those logicians whom he calls 'formalists' are not obviously relevant" (xviii).
- 13 Alice Ambrose also participated in this symposium as a critic of Nelson, but Nagel makes no mention of her position in his response.
- 14 See Nagel 1956, 100 for a clear statement that the point of Nagel's position is to maintain "a consistent experimentalism concerning all existential matters."
- 15 Juffras 2003, 179 notes that Nagel was promoted to full professor in 1946 and included in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1954. Nagel was also an editor of the *Journal of Philosophy* from 1939 to 1956.
- 16 Quine's 1957 address and Max Black's 1958 address show the increasing pull of canonical analytic figures.
- 17 Sarkar notes that Hempel 1969 and Nagel 1970 provide useful discussions of Nagel's account of reduction.
- 18 In the abstract Kim adds more qualifications: "If contemporary analytic philosophy can be said to have a philosophical ideology, it undoubtedly is naturalism" (Kim 2003, 83).
- 19 See also Nagel 1956, 237–9 and Nagel 1963 for some critical remarks on Carnap's approach to deductive and inductive logic.

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12

“ONE OF MY FEET WAS STILL PRETTY FIRMLY ENCASED IN THIS BOOT”

Behaviorism and *The Concept of Mind*

Michael Kremer

Gilbert Ryle’s 1949 masterwork, *The Concept of Mind* (CM), attacked a dualistic conception of the human person as composed of two co-ordinated substances, a mind and a body. Calling this the “dogma of the Ghost in the Machine,” Ryle diagnosed it as resulting from a “family of radical category mistakes” (15–16, 18). He claimed that dualists misunderstand the “logic” of the vocabulary used to describe our mental lives and present “facts belonging to one category in the idioms appropriate to another.” Ryle planned “not to deny the facts [of mental life] but to reallocate them” (8), through destructive arguments purporting to reduce dualist views to absurdity, and careful descriptions of the ways we talk about our mental lives and their complex logical interrelationships—“the logical geography” of our mental concepts.

Ryle aimed to open up space for considering human bodily behavior as directly “mental”—not an expression or effect of some underlying mental cause. Dualism implies that “muscular doing cannot itself be a mental operation,” since the former falls on one side of the ontological divide, and the latter, on the other (32). Ryle sought to show how a “muscular doing” *can be* a “mental operation,” how it can be true that a “clown’s trippings and tumblings are the workings of his mind, for they are his jokes” (33). He recognized that the physical movements of the clown can be reproduced by a clumsy person, whose trippings and tumblings are not properly described as her mind at work. But the difference between the two cases does not consist in “some hidden extra performance executed ‘in his [the clown’s] head’,” which is absent in his clumsy counterpart. Rather, the clown, but not his clumsy friend, possesses a *skill*—not “an occult or ghostly happening” but “a disposition, or a complex of dispositions,” inculcated by training that yields expertise. For Ryle, a disposition relates to something more than its exercise, but this extra something is not a further, hidden exercise, but

the manifold possibilities and actualities of its further exercises and manifestations. To say that the clown trips skillfully is to place his tripping into a pattern of behavior which he can exhibit on any number of appropriate occasions.

Thus, Ryle accused dualism of having “misconstrued the type-distinction between disposition and exercise into its mythical bifurcation of unwitnessable mental causes and their witnessable physical effects” (33). Here, he specified the category mistake of dualism as a confusion of dispositions and occurrences, and he repeatedly appealed to these categories in criticizing dualist conceptions and in fleshing out his own understanding of our mental lives. This has led to a common understanding of Ryle as promoting a behaviorist form of materialism. This makes it seem that Ryle must account for the clown’s skill in terms of his actual and possible physical movements, his dispositions to move his body in clownish ways, and the exercises of those dispositions in actual pratfalls. Such summary statements as “when we describe people as exercising qualities of mind, we are not referring to occult episodes of which their overt acts and utterances are effects; we are referring to those overt acts and utterances themselves” (25) only strengthen this impression.

Ryle recognized that “the general trend of this book will undoubtedly, and harmlessly be stigmatized as ‘behaviourist’” (327). As behaviorism was seen as a form of materialism, it is not surprising that this was how Ryle was read in early reviews and responses. Stuart Hampshire summarized Ryle’s conclusion as “Not Two-Worlds, but One World; not a Ghost, but a Body; (people are) not Occult but Obvious” (1950, 238); A. C. Ewing took Ryle “to deny that there is a mental world at all over and above our bodily behaviour” (1952–53, 48); J. L. Austin thought that Ryle, “though he does not believe the body is a machine, does believe that it alone, and not the ‘ghost,’ exists” (1950, 220); and Peter Geach ascribed to Ryle the “view that psychological statements are ... hypothetical or semi-hypothetical statements about overt behaviour” (1957, 4). This labeling, for the most part, has stuck—so strongly that Brian Weatherston, in a perceptive response to Scott Soames’s recent reading of Ryle as a behaviorist, felt obligated to write: “At one level Ryle surely is a behaviourist, because whatever *behaviourism* means in philosophy, it includes what Ryle says in *The Concept of Mind*. Ryle is the reference-fixer for at least one disambiguation of *behaviourist*” (2007, 435).¹

Yet, there are signs that Ryle did not intend to embrace such views. One month before the publication of *CM*, Ryle gave a radio talk entitled “Minds—or Human Beings?”² This title reveals Ryle’s real goal: what Elmer Sprague calls a “person-centred theory of mind” (2006, 2801).³ As Ryle’s contemporary Margaret MacDonald perceptively explained: “Professor Ryle’s basic contention is that mental qualities are ascribed not to minds but to *human beings*. In a sense minds (and bodies) are part of the myth” (1951, 83). A number of passages in *CM* support this reading:

- “Men are not machines, not even ghost-ridden machines. They are men—a tautology which is sometimes worth remembering” (81).

- “Assertions about a person’s mind are ... assertions of special sorts about that person” (167).
- “Man need not be degraded to a machine by being denied to be a ghost in a machine. He might, after all, be a sort of animal, namely a higher mammal. There has yet to be ventured the hazardous leap to the hypothesis that perhaps he is a man” (328).

This person-centered reading is also supported by Ryle’s claim to have dissolved materialism and idealism along with dualism:

the hallowed contrast between Mind and Matter will be dissipated, but dissipated not by either of the equally hallowed absorptions of Mind by Matter or of Matter by Mind, but in quite a different way. ... [B]oth Idealism and Materialism are answers to an improper question.

(22)

It also helps to explain the fact, noted by A. J. Ayer in “An Honest Ghost?” (1970), that in Ryle’s “dispositional” sketches of various mentalistic terms, other mentalistic terms appear frequently (54ff). Ryle was not engaged in the “‘reduction’ of mental states and processes to physical states and processes,” which he viewed as just as confused as dualism (*CM*, 22). Consequently, we should read passages which might sound materialist or behaviorist charitably. For example, when Ryle wrote that “to talk of a person’s mind ... is to talk of the person’s abilities, liabilities and inclinations to do and undergo certain things, and of the doing and undergoing of these things in the ordinary world” (199), we should take “doing” to include, for example, imagining and thinking, and we should take “undergoing” to include, for example, feeling pain. As Ayer also makes clear in his article, Ryle was not hostile to what we would commonly *call* the “inner.” He wanted to rule out the idea of a “ghostly privacy” that would provide “privileged access” to our “private inner states,” known immediately to us but unknowable to others. He had no problem with the “convenient privacy” of things that we keep to ourselves (1970, 35).⁴

Nonetheless, Ryle was not perfectly clear on all of this in *CM*. It was no accident that Austin, Hampshire, Ewing, Geach, and their many distinguished successors read Ryle as a physicalist and behaviorist. Ryle wrote in *CM* that “the assumptions against which I exhibit most here are assumptions of which I myself have been a victim. Primarily I am trying to get some disorders out of my own system” (9). While he mainly had dualism in mind, I will argue that he also felt the temptations of materialism and behaviorism, even as he wrote the book.

An illuminating anecdote from Geoffrey Warnock supports this view. In the early 1950s Ryle commented on a paper he had written about *CM*. Warnock (1979) reports that “the contrast between the ‘occurrences’ and ‘dispositions’ seemed to me, in Ryle’s book, to *look* more important to him than it really was.” Consequently, he had written that the book gives the misleading impression “that

he wishes to deny that there are any happenings at all to be rightly called 'mental', and so to assert that to speak of a person's mind is always to speak ('dispositionally') of certain occurrences, overt doings and undergoings ... the only true categorical statements would be those stating facts about overt physical happenings.'" Ryle commented: "Yes. When I wrote the first draft it weighed with me much too much. I was getting more tepid about it before the end, but certainly one of my feet was still pretty firmly encased in this boot" (Warnock, 1979, x).

In this essay, I illuminate Ryle's relationship to behaviorism by placing his work in historical context. I explain why he underestimated the dangers of behaviorism, thinking that it would be "harmless" for his book to be given that label, and I show that the behaviorist moments still present in *CM* represent a disorder that he was working out of his system as he wrote the book. With these goals in mind, we turn to the historical setting of *CM*.

While Ryle was still an undergraduate, Bertrand Russell introduced behaviorism to British philosophy, notably in his 1921 *The Analysis of Mind (AM)*.⁵ In this and other works he never fully embraced behaviorism, but he gave it serious consideration as a contribution to the philosophy of mind and employed the terminology of *dispositions* and *occurrences* that would play such an important role in *CM*, distinguishing, for example, dispositional belief from "actual active belief"⁶ (*AM*, 246). Dispositional accounts of belief and knowledge were taken up by such philosophers as Frank Ramsey and R. B. Braithwaite, and by 1930, Ryle could write in "Are There Propositions?" (1929–30) that the fact that "as ordinarily used, the verbs to know, believe, be of the opinion that, etc., denote not momentary occurrences but more or less enduring conditions ... is sometimes put by saying that these terms denote dispositions" (115). He rejected this view, since 'Knowledge' and 'belief' seem to denote *deposits* rather than *dispositions*" (116). By *CM*, however, he would embrace the claim that "the verbs 'know' and 'believe' are ordinarily used dispositionally" (44).

What brought about this shift? I will argue that Ryle was influenced not by Russell, Ramsey, or Braithwaite, but by his first truly brilliant pupil, A. J. Ayer.⁷ In late 1932 Ryle sent his star student to Vienna to work with Moritz Schlick. Ayer returned to Oxford a convert to the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle, and published a series of papers intended to spread the positivist gospel, culminating in his famous 1936 manifesto, *Language, Truth and Logic (LTL)*. One of these early essays, "The Case for Behaviourism," appeared in November 1933.

This defense of behaviorism followed closely the argument of Carnap's "Psychology in Physical Language," published earlier that year (1933). Like Carnap, Ayer distinguished scientific from philosophical behaviorism, taking the latter to be "a theory about the meaning of a certain class of propositions," according to which "every psychological proposition about the state of mind of a person X is translatable into a proposition asserting the existence of a certain physical structure in X's body, characterized by its relations to certain physical stimuli." Ayer's

philosophical behaviorism is a kind of reductionist physicalism, aiming “to make psychology a branch of physics” (1933, 230–1). It follows the path that Ryle would later aim to block, abolishing the distinction between Mind and Matter by subsuming the first under the second.

Three years later, in *LTL*, Ayer developed a phenomenalist account of both mind and body as “logical constructions” out of “sense-contents.” He explained talk of “logical constructions” in terms of translation: to say that physical objects are logical constructions out of sense-contents is to say that every sentence referring to physical objects is translatable into a sentence referring only to sense-contents (63). He claimed that to ask whether sense-contents are mental or physical makes no sense; these terms only apply to “objects which are logical constructions out of them” (123). The resulting position resembled the Jamesian “neutral monism” that Russell had promoted in *AM*; like Russell, Ayer treated both bodies and minds as classes of series of sense-contents.

In *LTL*, Ayer would seem to have found a way to dissolve dualism without taking either mind or matter as fundamental. However, he faced a problem. The sense-contents used in “constructing” both physical and mental objects included “the immediate data not merely of ‘outer’ but also of ‘introspective’ sensation” (53). This led him to treat his *own* mind and the minds of others asymmetrically: “‘one’s own mental states’ ... are mainly constituted by ‘introspective’ sense-contents and by sense-contents which are elements of one’s own body; ... the ‘mental states of others’ ... are mainly constituted by sense-contents which are elements of other living bodies” (124). Ayer’s account of *other* minds was purely behavioristic, but his account of his *own* mind was not.

This asymmetry weakens his response to the worry that his account is threatened by solipsism. Ayer rejected the argument from analogy, leading from observed similarities in others’ behavior and his own, to postulated “introspective” episodes in others, similar to his own. Since he would be incapable of experiencing these episodes, his strict verificationism implied that this argument would depend on an essentially unverifiable, and so meaningless, hypothesis. He therefore fell back on behaviorism: “I must define other people in terms of their empirical manifestations—that is, in terms of the behaviour of their bodies, and ultimately in terms of sense-contents” (*LTL*, 129). This combination of a behaviorist approach to *other* minds with the inclusion of “introspective sense-contents” in the logical construction of his *own* mind, seems to relegate the minds of others to a second-class status as ersatz minds, in comparison with his own.

Marginal notes in Ryle’s copy of *LTL* (held at Linacre College Library in Oxford) show that he was aware of this problem in Ayer’s account.⁸ Ryle wrote “including introspective?” next to the following passages (the underlining is Ryle’s):

If I know that an object behaves in every way as a conscious being must, by definition, behave, then I know that it is really conscious. And this is an

analytical proposition. For when I assert that an object is conscious I am asserting no more than that it would, in response to any conceivable test, exhibit the empirical manifestations of consciousness.

(1952, 130; page 204 in Ryle's copy)

It does not follow from the fact that each man's experiences are private to himself that no one ever has good reason to believe that another man's experiences are qualitatively the same as his own. For we define the qualitative identity and difference of two people's sense-experiences in terms of the similarity and dissimilarity of their reactions to empirical tests.

(1952, 131–2; page 206 in Ryle's copy)

These marginalia highlight the problematic asymmetry in Ayer's treatment of his own mind and other minds. Talk of other minds cannot be translated into sense-content talk by the *same procedure* as talk of his own mind, since "introspective" sense-contents are relevant for the latter, but not for the former. Ayer responded to this problem in his 1940 *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* (FEK). He rejected a thoroughgoing behaviorist approach, which would treat even his own "introspective" experiences behavioristically, on the grounds that facts about one's experience are only contingently correlated with facts about one's body (149–51). Instead, he revived the argument from analogy, borrowing from Ryle's 1936 paper "Unverifiability-by-Me" the idea that while two people cannot *simultaneously* have the same experience, there is no logical bar to them having the same experience at *different* times. This was supposed to show that the attribution of "introspective" experiences to other people would not be an empirically meaningless hypothesis, as he had previously feared (FEK, 166–70).

Ayer returned to these issues after the Second World War. His work in this period was influenced by Ryle, and Ryle's thought in turn was influenced by Ayer's writings and their reception. In the first volume of his autobiography, *Part of My Life*, Ayer writes that

The Concept of Mind, was not published until 1949, but he [Ryle] had hit upon its central doctrines several years before. They were already formulated in an unpublished paper called "The Mind is its Own Place," which he sent me as early as 1946.⁹

(1977, 295–6)

While this paper of Ryle's appears not to have been preserved, we can get some indication of its main themes from Ayer's writings of the time.

In a January 1946 appendix to the second edition of *LTL* (later printed as an Introduction), Ayer expressed skepticism about his attempt in *FEK* to defend the argument from analogy and was "inclined to revert to a 'behaviouristic' interpretation of propositions about other people's experiences," in spite of its "air of

paradox" (1952, 19–20). In his contribution to a symposium on "Other Minds" at the Aristotelian Society in July 1946,¹⁰ however, Ayer again softened his behaviorism.¹¹ He focused on the question of whether we "have good reasons for believing" propositions such as that another person "is, or has been feeling a certain emotion, or enjoying certain sensations, or thinking certain thoughts" (1946, 188–9). Skepticism about our justification for such claims rests, he said, on the thought that they refer "not to any behaviour ... open to our observation, but rather to certain events or processes ... 'going on in his mind' ... directly accessible to him alone." Ayer stated that "some philosophers, including at one time myself" had appealed to the idea that "to say of another person that he has such thoughts and feelings is ... to say something ... about his actual or possible behaviour, and ... to say no more than this" in response to such doubts (190–1). But Ayer no longer accepted this behaviorist solution.

Taking the example of "an unspoken thought," he argued that if I tell you what I have been thinking on being asked, and you report my thought to someone else, what you say "is not equivalent to any set of statements about my overt behaviour" (191–2). He added two remarks strongly reminiscent of things said by Ryle in *CM*. First, he issued a caveat: "I do not wish to imply that a process of thought is necessarily distinct from the expression of it. I do not believe ... that when a person is talking intelligently it is always the case that a shadow process of thinking is simultaneously going on in his mind" (192). This foreshadows Ryle's claim that

the sealing of the lips is no part of the definition of thinking. A man may think aloud or half under his breath; he may think silently, yet with lip-movements conspicuous enough to be read by a lip-reader; or he may, as most of us have since nursery-days, think in silence and with motionless lips.
(*CM*, 34)

Ayer got this idea from Ryle, as he acknowledged in a footnote: "My attention was drawn to this point by Professor Ryle" (1946, 192).

Ayer added, however, that "sometimes there are two processes, as when a man is measuring his words; and sometimes a man has thoughts which he does not express, thoughts which, as we say, he keeps to himself" (192). Contrary to expectations formed by the image of Ryle as an arch-behaviorist, here too Ayer's claims foreshadow *CM*. Ryle there recognized that "we often do not only reflect before we act but reflect in order to act properly. The chess-player may require some time to plan his moves before he makes them" (*CM*, 29). And he claimed that we *can* "keep our thoughts to ourselves," though this "is a sophisticated accomplishment" (27).

However, Ayer recognized, abandoning pure behaviorism reopens the question of the grounds for attributing to others the thoughts and feelings with which we credit them. Ayer considered once again the argument from analogy as a

response. John Wisdom, in his contribution to the symposium, had criticized this argument in a way that paralleled Ayer's own earlier misgivings in *LTL*. He argued that since "we do not know what it would be like to observe the state of the soul which inhabits another's body," we cannot infer the "inward states" of another person from their "outward behavior" (1946, 125).

Ayer *now* objected however, that Wisdom's argument depends on "the proposition that each person's experiences are private to himself," where this is supposed to entail "that he alone can have access to them" (1946, 194). He responded by distinguishing "two relevant senses of the word 'Private.'" In one sense, "an object is private if only one person owns it." But in a second sense, "privacy is a matter ... of security against being pried upon." Ayer accepted that one's experiences are private in the first sense, since "no two persons can have the same experience." But this does not entail that I cannot "have access to" your experiences—that would require your experiences to be *essentially* private in the second sense (196). Ayer admitted that "I cannot think another man's thoughts" but denied that "I can't know directly what he is thinking." The other man might think out loud in my presence, in which case his thought would be known directly by me, since otherwise "this would imply that his thought was necessarily distinguishable from his expression of it." Ayer accepted that there is a "residue [of people's thoughts] that goes on in private ... in the sense that they are able to conceal them." But, he suggested, this concealment is not "theoretically as well as practically impenetrable by others." Ayer concluded that "I do not see why the fact that I know myself to have thoughts and feelings which I do not express should not give me good reason for believing that other people do the same" (197).

These remarks are strikingly similar to the brief discussion of solipsism at the end of the second chapter of *CM*, where Ryle claimed that "I discover that there are other minds in understanding what other people say and do." He admitted that "there are some things which I can find out about you only, or best, through being told of them by you." But this does not mean that I cannot know of these things, if you choose not to keep them private (60–1). The kind of privacy Ryle countenanced was "not the secrecy ascribed to the postulated episodes of the ghostly shadow-world," but the "convenient privacy which characterises the tunes that run in my head and the things that I see in my mind's eye" (35).

Although Ayer's "Other Minds" antedated *CM* by three years, the fact that Ayer had read an early draft of the ideas of *CM* indicates that it was Ryle who influenced Ayer here. In fact, in Ayer's writing of this period we can indirectly see Ryle's working out of the ideas that took final form in his book. This conclusion is reinforced by a consideration of Ayer's 1947 inaugural lecture for his chair at University College London, *Thinking and Meaning (TM)*. Ayer dedicated the lecture to Ryle: "I have learned so much from him since I was first his pupil that I am afraid of making him responsible for more than he would care to acknowledge. But I can safely say that if my treatment of these problems contains anything of value, it is primarily due to him" (1).

TM had an impressive reception for a 28-page pamphlet. Within two years, it garnered reviews by Alice Ambrose, J. D. Mabbott, and H. H. Price, and responses by A. D. Woozley and Gustav Bergmann; it was discussed by H. L. A. Hart and G. E. Hughes in an *Aristotelian Society* symposium; and an essay by A. C. Ewing implicitly responded to it. Price praised it as “not only a most auspicious inauguration” but “a most important contribution to philosophy ... perhaps the best and the most exciting work he has written” (1948, 239). Yet Ayer never anthologized or reprinted it, for he came to realize just how deeply it was indebted to Ryle’s essay “The Mind is Its Own Place.” In the second volume of his autobiography, *More of My Life*, he admitted that “much of my lecture bears the imprint of this essay by which I was perhaps more strongly convinced than I eventually was by the book” (1984, 23). We can therefore use *TM* as a window into Ryle’s early thoughts in preparing *CM*, and, I will argue, Ryle’s response to the critical reception of *TM* was probably responsible for some of the most original moves made in his own book.

In *TM*, Ayer tackled the problem of *analyzing* the “proposition that at least one human thinks.” He started from a “common view” of this proposition, involving five factors: the person who thinks; the instrument (the mind, a faculty of the mind, or the brain); the process (mental acts); the medium (images, words, or symbols); and the object (referent, proposition) (2). Ayer argued that all but the first of these factors can be either eliminated or reduced to something much less metaphysically portentous. He allowed that such events as dreams, emotions, feelings, and calculations can be called “mental,” since they are non-spatial and “private” (presumably in the sense of “security from being pried upon” discussed in “Other Minds”). Echoing his earlier phenomenalism, he accepted the existence of the mind “as a class of mental events,” but rejected the mind as “something distinct from and ... underlying such mental events” (*TM*, 4–5). He argued that the mind cannot be thought of as the instrument with which one thinks, concluding “that thinking is done by persons but not with any instrument” (7).

Turning to the “process of thought,” supposed to consist in a sequence of “mental acts,” Ayer reiterated his view from “Other Minds,” explicitly stating that he was “following Professor Ryle”: “in the cases where the thought is given its expression, the expressing and the thinking merge into a single process,” so that “the process of thought” cannot be “validly distinguished from the expression of it” (*TM*, 7). When “people think before they speak,” Ayer suggested, they are saying words “to themselves,” without the “saying of the words reduplicated by a shadow process of ‘thought’,” which would be both “wordless” and “wholly fictitious” (8). He distanced his view from the classical behaviorist position of Watson, for which “thinking to oneself” involves motions of the lips or the larynx, averring that “I have no objection to saying that what I have described as ‘talking to oneself’ is, in some sense, a mental process” (9).

Ayer did not say what this process of “talking to oneself” consists of.¹² He argued, however, that it must be carried out in a *symbolic medium* analogous to

language and concluded that to say what a thought is about is to speak of the meaning of symbols (*TM*, 12–14). He used infinite regress arguments, similar to those employed by Ryle in *CM* and elsewhere, to show that understanding a symbol consists in the ability to use it intelligently and does not depend on a mental act of association, intention, or recognition (20–5). Claiming that “to say what a symbol means is not to relate it to an object, but to give it an interpretation in terms of other symbols” (27), he concluded that he could eliminate the final factor, the object of thought, from the analysis of thinking.¹³ Ayer later said that his “main concern” in the lecture was “to clarify the concept of the ‘object of thought,’” but characterized his attempt as “not very successful” since it left hanging a satisfactory account of “the functioning of symbols” (1984, 23). But, for our purposes, Ayer’s conclusions in *TM* about the analysis of “modes of thought” such as “knowing, believing, doubting, judging, imagining” are more significant.

Ayer rejected as “largely mythological” the “current analysis” of such phenomena as “acts of the mind ... directed on an object,” since “such words as ‘knowing’ or ‘believing’ or ‘doubting’ are dispositional words” (*TM*, 14). For example, to say of someone that she believes a proposition is to say that she behaves “in a way that, in the relevant situations, is more likely to be successful if the [proposition] is true than if it is not” (14–15). To the objection that such dispositions must be caused by specific acts of “thinking of a proposition which I know or believe or doubt,” he replied that, while we can ask for the causal origin of, say, a belief-disposition, there is no reason to think that this must involve an occurrent act of believing (15–16). Ayer also treated knowledge as “a certain set of dispositions,” suggesting that “knowledge can be identified on its subjective side with fully confident belief,” while adding conditions roughly amounting to the requirements that the belief be both justified and true (18–19). He concluded that knowledge, like belief, need not be conceived as “a mental act directed towards an object” (20).

Earlier, in “The Case for Behaviourism,” Ayer had held that every sentence referring to mental events could be translated into a sentence referring only to the physical world. In *TM*, in contrast, Ayer’s sketches of dispositional analyses of mental terms employ descriptions that are not purely physical. For example, he specifies some of the dispositions involved in his daughter’s knowledge that “George the Third reigned from 1760 to 1820” as follows: “if people ask her when George the Third came to the throne, and *she does not wish to tease them*, she will say that it was in the year 1760”; “if she *sets herself* to pass a history examination she will not ascribe to George the Third behaviour which is inconsistent with his living when he did”; and “if she is told the date of the Napoleonic Wars she will *be able to infer* from this that they occurred in the reign of George the Third” (14–15, my emphases). In his review of *TM*, Price noted this: “Mr. Ayer’s use of the word ‘behaviour’ here is a little odd. (Or perhaps the trouble is that Dr. Watson has spoilt the word for us.)”¹⁴ (1948, 250). Here, Ayer’s own Ryle-influenced writing exhibits the same appeal to mentalistic vocabulary in illustrating the

dispositional character of mental concepts that Ayer would later note in *CM* (1970, 54ff).

Many Rylean themes emerge in *TM*: the mind is not a substance underlying mental acts; it is *persons* who think, without using any instrument; in speaking intelligibly one is thinking out loud, not expressing an “occult” process of thought; and belief and knowledge are dispositional. At the same time, some of Ryle’s most original ideas in *CM* do not show up in *TM*. Especially important are the careful elaborations and distinctions of Ryle’s fifth chapter, “Dispositions and Occurrences”:

1. the distinction between multi-track and single-track disposition words (118ff);
2. the distinction between capacities and tendencies (125ff);
3. the idea of mongrel categorical or semi-hypothetical statements (138ff);
4. the concept of achievement words (149ff).

Each of these ideas enriches Ryle’s “logical geography” of our mental concepts, and each plays an important role in his argument in *CM*. Moreover, each is a genuinely new Rylean contribution, unlike the distinction between occurrences and dispositions, which was already a philosophical commonplace.¹⁵ Yet none of these ideas appeared in *TM*. One can infer that they did not feature in Ryle’s paper “The Mind is Its Own Place” which had so influenced Ayer.

I will argue that each of these ideas presents a response to an issue arising from the critical reception of *TM*. This helps to explain a curious fact about *CM*: Ryle says *both* that the “dogma of the Ghost in the Machine” is “*one* big mistake ... a category-mistake” (*CM*, 15–16), *and* that it derives from a “*family* of radical category-mistakes” (18). I suggest that the first charge represents an earlier phase of Ryle’s thinking, the “first draft” in which the distinction between dispositions and occurrences “weighed with [him] much too much.” The second charge reflects a more nuanced conception, developed in response to an indirect critical reception of his own ideas, mediated by Ayer.

I take these four Rylean concepts in order, showing how they arise naturally out of reflection on Ayer’s lecture and its scholarly reception.

1

Ryle used the distinction between single-track and multi-track dispositions to block the dualist inference from the dispositional character of, for example, belief, to the thought that this disposition is exercised in acts of “occurrent belief”—“actual active belief,” as Russell put it in *AM* (118). Ryle objected that even were someone to possess such a disposition to “harp on” a proposition, this would not show that they believed it, “unless we also found them inferring, imagining, saying and doing a great number of things as well” (*CM*, 44). This response

reveals the “multi-track” nature of belief—it signifies a tendency “to do, not things of one unique kind, but things of lots of different kinds” (*AM*, 118). Ryle used this point to distinguish two of the “family of category-mistakes” underlying dualism: “The temptation to construe dispositional words as episodic words and this other temptation to postulate that any verb that has a dispositional use must also have a corresponding episodic use are two sources of one and the same myth” (119).

This second temptation was exhibited in A. C. Ewing’s 1948 paper, “Mental Acts”—possibly written in response to *TM*. Ewing’s paper is a dialog between “Empiricus,” whose view is similar to Ayer’s, and “Philonous” (Ewing’s representative), who defends mental acts. Empiricus starts from the fact that one can believe, know, or desire something even when not consciously thinking of it, which he takes to reveal the dispositional character of belief, knowledge, and desire (1948, 202, 211). Philonous replies that such dispositions presuppose acts in which they would be manifested—mental acts of occurrent believing, knowing, or desiring (203, 211, 212). Empiricus responds that the relevant dispositions are manifested not in such mental acts but in physical action—belief, for example, is understood as “a disposition to act as if what we are said to believe were true” (203, 211). Philonous objects that this is viciously circular, for “to act as if *p* were true can only mean acting as if we believed that *p* were true” (211, 213).

Ayer’s explanation of belief, in terms of behavior that is more likely to be successful if *p* is true, is not open to Ewing’s vicious circularity objection. But it seems vulnerable to an objection in the vicinity. For, there is no *one kind of behavior*, which is captured by Ayer’s formula. Thus Ayer has not told us *what* disposition belief in *p* is to be identified with. Ryle’s distinction allows the response that this is simply because belief is a *multi-track* disposition. Ryle generalized this point: “the higher-grade dispositions of people ... are, in general, not single-track dispositions, but dispositions the exercises of which are indefinitely heterogeneous” (*CM*, 44). To take a Rylean example, there is no one type of behavior, which belief that the ice is thin is a disposition to perform. We can begin to enumerate the behaviors characteristic of this belief—such as (following Ryle’s list) telling oneself and others that it is thin, acquiescing in other people’s assertions to that effect, objecting to statements to the contrary, drawing consequences from the original proposition, skating warily, shuddering, dwelling in imagination on possible disasters and warning other skaters (134–5). But we should not expect to complete this task.

Ryle also applied the distinction between single-track and multi-track dispositions to respond to a criticism of Ayer by A. D. Woozley in his paper “Dispositions.” Woozley had objected to Ayer’s dispositional explanation of understanding that “when I come to understand something ... it is not simply the case that a new hypothetical proposition about me is true. Coming to understand involves a sort of mental click, like finding the right piece to fill the gap in a jig-saw puzzle ...” (1948, 352). Ryle, however, saw understanding as a multi-track capacity, such

that Woozley's "mental click" may *accompany* understanding, but cannot *constitute* it. Ryle explains in *CM*, in terms suggesting he is directly responding to Woozley (171–2):

it is part of the meaning of "you understood it" that you could have done so and so and would have done it, if such and such, and the test of whether you understood it is a range of performances satisfying the apodoses of these general hypothetical statements. ... [T]here is no single nuclear performance, overt or in your head, which would determine that you had understood the argument. Even if you claimed that you had experienced a flash or click of comprehension and had actually done so, you would still withdraw your other claim to have understood the argument, if you found that you could not paraphrase it, illustrate, expand or recast it; and you would allow someone else to have understood it who could meet all examination questions about it, but reported no click of comprehension.¹⁶

2

For Ryle, dispositional terms are connected with possibilities, counterfactual circumstances, and conditional statements. To say that sugar is soluble in water is to say, that *if* sugar were to be put in a sufficient quantity of water, it *would* dissolve. But the broad category of dispositional terms was to include not only "tendencies" such as solubility of sugar in water, but also "capacities." The latter involve possibilities expressed using "can" or "able" and, in contrast with tendencies, do not imply any likelihood of something happening. Ryle applied this distinction (as well as complex subdistinctions beneath it) in classifying dispositional mental terms. One particularly important case was his claim that knowledge and belief are not dispositions of the same kind: knowledge is a *capacity*, whereas belief is a *tendency* (*CM*, 133). With this, Ryle broke with the tradition of treating knowledge as a species of belief, thereby avoiding the problem Ayer faced in *TM* of explaining what needs to be added to belief to yield knowledge.

The need for such a careful classification of disposition words would have been made clear by Woozley's complaint in "Dispositions" that Ayer "seems constantly to confuse ability ... with disposition ..., *i.e.* to confuse saying that I *could* do something with saying that I *would* do it" (1948, 351). For example in his explanation of *understanding* as "purely dispositional," Ayer wrote that "in the case of an empirical statement it is a case of *being able* to describe, and ultimately to recognise, the situations that would make it true." But he added that "I have it only in the sense that I should behave in the appropriate way *if* the appropriate occasions arose" (*TM*, 22—my emphases). Here Ayer shifted from a Rylean capacity (Woozley's "ability") to a Rylean tendency (Woozley's "disposition"). Ryle's distinction blocks this confusion, and clarifies the "logical geography" of mental disposition terms.

3

Ryle introduced the idea of a “mongrel categorical statement” as part of his account of those “mental occurrences” which fall under “heed concepts.” These are cases in which someone is “minding (or thinking) what they are doing”—including “noticing, taking care, attending” and so on (CM, 135–6). Ryle denied that such occurrences involve a common element such as a mental act of “contemplation or inspection” (136). Instead, he proposed that heed concepts have both a categorical/occurrent aspect and a hypothetical/dispositional aspect. Nonetheless, whatever falls under such a concept is a *single* occurrence. He referred to this combination of the logical features of categorical predication and dispositional predication with the phrases “mongrel categorical” or “semi-hypothetical.”

As an example, Ryle considered the description of a bird as migrating. This says that the bird is flying in a particular direction—the categorical or episodic dimension—but it also places this episode in a pattern of bird behavior, saying something about what the bird *would* do under different conditions—the hypothetical or dispositional dimension. Yet when a bird migrates there is only one thing happening, not two (CM, 142). Similarly, for Ryle, when a person is (say) attending to their knitting, they are not doing two things—knitting, and performing the special mental act of attending. They are knitting *attentively*—and this is a mongrel categorical statement, describing a single episode but placing it within a *pattern* of behavior. Another source of the “dogma of the Ghost in the Machine” is revealed in the confusion of a mongrel categorical statement describing a single episode both categorically and dispositionally, with a conjunctive categorical statement describing two co-ordinated episodes.

The identification of mongrel-categorical statements proved to be another fruitful addition to Ryle’s logical geography of mental concepts. Its importance would have again been made clear in Woozley’s skeptical look at Ayer’s understanding of dispositional terms. Woozley ended his paper with an example intended to challenge the idea that “dispositions can ... easily be reduced to the truth of hypothetical propositions about behaviour”: the need to distinguish between “my being prepared to do *x*, in the sense that if a suitable occasion arose I should do *x*, and my being prepared to do *x*, in the sense that not only is it true that if a suitable occasion arose I should do *x*, but also that I am now ready and waiting for the occasion to arise” (1948, 353). Using the concept of a mongrel categorical statement, Ryle could easily meet this challenge: the first sense of readiness is purely dispositional, whereas the second sense is semi-hypothetical, involving an episodic dimension (I *am now* waiting) and a dispositional dimension (I *would* do *x*, if ...), with no need for some special mental act of “holding oneself ready.”

4

Ryle’s distinction between task and achievement words further subdivides the larger grouping of occurrent or episodic terms. Ryle illustrated the distinction with

the difference between running a race and winning it. Characteristically, “in applying an achievement verb we are asserting that some state of affairs obtains over and above that which consists in the performance, if any, of the task activity” (*CM*, 150). Winning the race requires running it, but also that the other runners finish after you do. According to Ryle, many of the words “used to describe items in the inquisitive life of human beings” are achievement verbs, including “see,” “hear,” “taste,” “deduce,” “recall,” “know,” “discover,” “solve,” “prove,” and “observe”—and confusion of these verbs with other episodic verbs has been another source of “mystery-mongering theories.” Such theories postulate “special cognitive acts and operations” of, for example “seeing, hearing, and inferring” (151–2). From Ryle’s point of view, this is analogous to the idea that if I am the victor in a race, I must have done two separate things: running the race, and winning. In fact, I only did one thing: running the race, victoriously. The final qualification does not point to something additional *I* did, or even to the *manner* in which I did something. It registers the fact that my endeavors succeeded, which depends on factors beyond my control. Similarly, if I look for a misprint on a page, and find it, I have not done two things, looking and finding. I have done one thing, looking, successfully.

The distinction between task and achievement verbs once again prevents a confusion that lends support to Ryle’s dualist opponent. The need for such a distinction for this purpose would have been apparent from the fact that several readers of *TM* fell into precisely this confusion. First, in his review of *TM*, Price (1948) complained of Ayer’s “excessively Behaviouristic account of recognition,” citing Ayer’s claim that “The criteria for my recognizing an object lie wholly in my behaviour” (*TM*, 25). Price responded that “Sooner or later we must come back to an act, or occurrence, which is not merely behaviour, but is irreducibly cognitive: an act of *noticing* or *becoming aware*” (1948, 254). Ryle would object that “noticing” and “becoming aware” are achievement verbs, and do not stand for additional acts. But Price’s mistake was encouraged by Ayer—for “recognize” would also be classified by Ryle as an achievement verb, and it is *not* the case that its only criteria lie in the agent’s behavior—it requires that “some state of affairs obtains over and above that which consists in the performance, if any, of the task activity.” Price realized that something had gone missing from Ayer’s explanation, but mislocated this in a special mental act.

Second, in Ewing’s “Mental Acts,” Philonous invokes the example of “the word ‘see’ in the non-physical sense of ‘see’” as representing “a definite experience which would seem to be detectable introspectively when we say after a period of puzzlement, ‘Ah, this is clear to me now’” (1948, 203, 215, 217). Ryle would again reply that “see” is an achievement verb, and object that Ewing’s “definite experience” cannot *constitute* seeing something, since the experience could also accompany a failure to see.

Conclusion

Our examination of Ayer’s lecture and its reception confirms the hypothesis that *TM* represents the stage of Ryle’s thought contained in his lost paper “The Mind

is its Own Place” and in the first draft of *CM*—a stage in which the distinction between dispositions and occurrences had weighed on him “much too much.” Reacting to the reviews and critiques of *TM*, Ryle came to a richer, more sophisticated understanding of the “logical geography” of our mental concepts, leading him to see his dualist target as arising from a *family* of related and reinforcing confusions. By the time he had finished the book he must have felt that he had put the early stage of his thought, with its reliance on the simple distinction between dispositions and occurrences, behind him. Aware that his dispositional accounts of various mental concepts made an irreducible appeal to other seemingly mental concepts, such as those of feeling, of pretending to oneself that one is speaking, and so on, he would have felt free to dismiss any association of his book with behaviorism as “harmless”—for he had moved well past any simplistic behaviorist reduction of the mental to the material, explicitly rejecting this as partaking of the same confusions as the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine. However, the book retained many vestiges of an earlier, more dangerously behaviorist phase of his thought—not least in the suggestion that his dualist target is *one* big category mistake—with the result that many superb philosophers failed to see the true contours of his project. “One of his feet was still pretty firmly encased in this boot.” Yet to understand Ryle’s philosophical task, and his achievement, we need to see beyond such misleading aspects of his masterwork to his true intention. It is my hope that the history sketched here has helped us to do this.

Notes

- 1 For an excellent summary both of the early reception of Ryle’s work, and of the prevalence of the view of Ryle as a behaviorist in later textbooks, see Vriejn (2007).
- 2 The talk occurred on August 15, 1949. <http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/7fe99b515a7149859b6f9b6625690da8>. Accessed January 3, 2016.
- 3 Chapter 5 of Sprague (1999) defends the attribution of “personism” to Ryle in detail.
- 4 See Tanney (2009) for an illuminating discussion of Ayer’s essay and of the upshot for Ryle’s thought.
- 5 For discussion of the reception of behaviorism in American philosophy, see Hatfield (2012).
- 6 For discussion of Russell and behaviorism, see Kitchener (2004).
- 7 For a good summary of Ayer’s thought, see Quinton (1991).
- 8 I thank Fiona Richardson, librarian of Linacre College, for allowing me unfettered access to the books donated by Ryle to the College library on his retirement in 1968.
- 9 The title is from *Paradise Lost*, Book I (“The Mind is its own place, and in it self/Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n”). Ryle used it in *CM* to describe his target: “The mind is its own place and in his inner life each of us lives the life of a ghostly Robinson Crusoe” (13).
- 10 The other papers, by J. L. Austin and John Wisdom, achieved lasting fame.
- 11 Ayer’s commitment to the general phenomenalist translation program was also crumbling. By 1947, in “Phenomenalism”, he would reject the translatability of sentences about physical objects into sentences about sense-data, and suggest treating “beliefs about physical objects as constituting a theory, the function of which is to explain the course of our sensory experiences” (1946–47, 196).

- 12 In *CM*, Ryle would later explain “silent soliloquy” as analogous to pretending to oneself that one is talking, while abstaining from actually talking (269–70)—an explanation that in no way reduces such self-talk to bodily behavior.
- 13 As Quinton (1991, 42) points out, this argument builds on his discussion of “Sentences, Propositions, and Facts” in chapter 2 of *FEK*, and traces back to Ryle’s argument in his 1930 essay “Are There Propositions?”
- 14 Price’s examples were from Ayer’s discussion of “knowing what is said,” but the point is the same.
- 15 For example, in “Is there Knowledge by Acquaintance?”, published in the same year as *CM*, G. E. Hughes mentioned “that distinction between disposition-words and occurrent-words which it has been one of the most valuable achievements of recent philosophical work to clarify” (1949, 106).
- 16 Ryle’s notion of achievement, discussed below, is also relevant here: *coming* to understand is an achievement, and this does not require a separate mental event to be added to the acquisition of the multi-track capacity of understanding.

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13

QUINE

The Last and Greatest Scientific Philosopher¹

Sean Morris

It has only been in comparatively recent times that W. V. Quine (1908–2000) has been subjected to significant historical treatment. No doubt this has been due largely to the length of his philosophical career, spanning roughly seventy years. For the same reason, he has generally been regarded as a contemporary analytic philosopher, with much of the analytic philosophy since 1950, being, one way or another, a response to his views.² Indeed, I would claim that it is contemporary analytic philosophy that has done most to shape our understanding of Quine's philosophy. In this chapter, I will argue that viewing Quine in this way treats him as too familiar; it ignores Quine's deep engagement with the earlier and, I would say, now largely neglected, tradition of scientific philosophy, which held much sway over Anglo-American philosophy until the 1950s.³ All of Quine's three great teachers—Bertrand Russell, C. I. Lewis, and Rudolf Carnap—had deep connections to this tradition. And while Quine himself has generally eschewed philosophical labels, scientific philosophy is one that he has espoused.⁴ Indeed, I will claim that through the refining of his teachers' views, Quine can really be read as the culmination of the scientific tradition in philosophy.

While the self-conception of much of contemporary analytic philosophy is often as a scientific philosophy, the original tradition of scientific philosophy was much broader, incorporating elements of positivism, neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, and analytic philosophy, as well as some of the American pragmatists.⁵ Furthermore, and more importantly, I think scientific philosophy can be distinguished from much of the contemporary scene by analytic philosophy's return to metaphysics, perhaps somewhat ironically as a result of Quine's work.⁶ Contemporary analytic philosophy perhaps still sees itself as taking a scientific approach to philosophical problems, particularly in its willingness to adopt technical methods and in appealing to the results of current science, but much of the

critical attitude towards metaphysics has gone by the board. This has led many contemporary analytic philosophers to demand more from Quine's philosophy than it seems to offer.⁷ What I hope to show below is that Quine was very much rooted in this earlier tradition and its critical attitude towards more metaphysical approaches. For Quine, philosophy should not just appeal to the results of science but should be constrained by science. This is what a truly scientific philosophy comes to for Quine.⁸ By failing to appreciate this point, contemporary analytic philosophy has often criticized Quine on grounds that he would not accept, or has foisted problems upon him that he finds irrelevant. For example, his thesis of the indeterminacy of translation has been one that many philosophers have seen in need of solving. Quine's point rather with this thesis was to show that meaning was simply not a concept that meets scientific standards. As such, it does not present a problem that a properly scientific philosophy should try to address. To do so would be to sink back into the stagnant metaphysics that scientific philosophy sought to overcome.

In what follows, I will attempt to show through three examples—propositions, experience, and the analytic/synthetic distinction—how Quine thought he could bring scientific philosophy to its culmination by purifying the philosophy of his teachers of its more metaphysical elements.⁹ In conclusion, I will sketch how a commitment to Quine's conception of philosophy speaks of a kind of progress in philosophy lost to much of the contemporary analytic scene.

Before I begin, let me briefly characterize the tradition of scientific philosophy. This movement began to develop during the mid-19th century in response to the very speculative metaphysics of post-Kantian idealism.¹⁰ The post-Kantian idealists had attempted to distinguish the methods and aims of philosophy from those of the sciences, often by using religion or the arts as a model for philosophy. This yielded a highly subjective approach, with the expectation that an isolated genius could develop a complete theory of the world, such as is exemplified by Hegel's work. The scientific philosophers were highly critical of the grand metaphysical systems of the idealists. They were also influenced by Kant, but whereas Kant had sought to show that metaphysics could indeed be turned into a proper science once subjected to his critical method, the scientific philosophers generally thought traditional metaphysics should simply be replaced by their new scientific approach to philosophy. Helmholtz's 1855 address "Über das Sehen des Menschen" (given at the dedication of a monument to Kant at Königsberg) is a particularly important document for the move towards scientific philosophy. Here, Helmholtz articulated a number of features that usefully characterize the new scientific philosophy, among them a rejection of more metaphysical approaches to philosophizing; the incorporation of the results of the most up-to-date science into philosophy; and a reestablishment of close cooperation between philosophical and scientific researchers.

We find all of these features in the philosophical work of Russell, Lewis, and Carnap. And it is from this tradition that I will argue we can most easily see

Quine's philosophy developing. In what follows, we will see Quine refining and clarifying aspects of his teachers' views that he found to violate the strictures of scientific philosophy. Quine not so much rejects these aspects as replaces them with concepts that do meet the rigorous scientific standards that they all profess their allegiance to. Let me now turn specifically to Quine's place in the history of scientific philosophy. I will look at the respective influences on him of Russell, Lewis, and Carnap in chronological order. This ordering, however, is also well suited to certain philosophical aims as well since I take it that Quine took Carnap to be as close as we had come to a truly scientific philosophy prior to the philosophy of Quine himself.

I

Recalling his beginnings in philosophy, Quine wrote that it was reading Russell "and not my two survey courses in philosophy, that further whetted my appetite for cosmic understanding" (*The Time of My Life*, 1985 (henceforth *TML*), 58). Among the books Quine mentions specifically was *Our Knowledge of the External World*, which, along with "Scientific Method in Philosophy" and "On the Relation of Sense Data to Physics", offers Russell's most developed account of his scientific philosophy.¹¹ Its lessons were not lost on the young Quine. Here, we find Russell exhibiting all of the key features of scientific philosophy just sketched above.

Lamenting on philosophy's lack of progress in contrast to the sciences, which Russell attributes to philosophy's earlier desire for a single grand system of the world, he recommends instead that

A scientific philosophy ... will be piecemeal and tentative like other sciences; above all, it will be able to invent hypotheses which, even if they are not wholly true, will yet remain fruitful after the necessary corrections have been made. This possibility of successive approximations to the truth is, more than anything else, the source of the triumphs of science, and to transfer this possibility to philosophy is to ensure a progress in method whose importance it would be almost impossible to exaggerate.

(1914c, 87)

Here we see Russell's rejection of the grand philosophical systems of the past, which he thought primarily responsible for philosophy's lack of progress. Their central flaw being that when these systems were found in error, there was nothing to do but start over completely from scratch. By contrast, in the most successful sciences research went on piecemeal, allowing for the detection of isolated errors that could be corrected without bringing down the system in its entirety. In this way research could build upon past accomplishments, thus bringing about the progress that philosophy so severely lacked. It was an approach that Russell

elsewhere summed up as “Divide and conquer” (1914c, 87). Indeed, Russell thought that we could do no better than what science itself has to offer:

There is not any superfine brand of knowledge, obtainable by the philosopher, which can give us a standpoint from which to criticize the whole of the knowledge of daily life. The most that can be done is to examine and purify our common knowledge by an internal scrutiny, assuming the canons by which it has been obtained, and applying them with more care and with more precision. Philosophy cannot boast of having achieved such a degree of certainty that it can have authority to condemn the facts of experience and the laws of science.

(1914a, 73–4)¹²

Not only his basic method for doing philosophy, but also the project of *Our Knowledge of the External World* and the means for carrying it out exemplifies the scientific approach in its appeal to developments in modern science. The basic problem Russell identified was how to reconcile the world of sense with the world of physics, that is, given that science seems to proceed wholly by observation, how are we to reconcile our subjective sensory experience with the seemingly objective world that science speaks of? Russell’s idea—appealing to scientific developments in mathematics, physics, and psychology¹³—was to construct the objective world of physics from sense data. By way of sense data and logical constructions from them, the world of physics could be regained (1914b, 113–14). Russell’s worry was that without such a construction, science itself would be forced to make assumptions about a hidden reality to which we could never have access to, what he termed “a piece of gratuitous metaphysics” (1914a, 111). Since he held that we did have direct access to (or acquaintance with, to use Russell’s terminology) logic and sense data, his logical constructions would avoid such problems.¹⁴ It was for this reason that he took his “supreme maxim in scientific philosophizing” to be that “*Wherever possible, logical constructions are to be substituted for inferred entities*” (1914b, 121; Russell’s italics).

Although he did not explicitly announce his program for scientific philosophy until 1914 in the context of his external world project, Russell had already developed the requisite logical methods in his earlier logicist project—the construction of all mathematics from logic. Indeed, Russell claims this earlier construction as the inspiration for the external world project (1914a, 10). Since this earlier work in the foundations of mathematics was most relevant to Quine’s early philosophy, let me conclude my discussion of Russell with some comments on it. Just as with the external world project, Russell explained that by replacing the seemingly mysterious entities of mathematics with logical entities, ad hoc metaphysical postulates of entities such as numbers could be avoided (1914b, 122). Indeed, so impressed as he was by the power of the new mathematical logic, Russell thought that all philosophical problems could now ultimately be construed as logical

problems once subjected to the proper analysis (1914a, 42). Russell himself had discovered this method independently of Frege and carried out the construction informally in his 1903 *Principles of Mathematics*, and then formally, with his co-author Alfred North Whitehead, in their 1910–13 *Principia Mathematica*. Quine read both works as an undergraduate, but it was the latter, which he described as “the crowning glory” of his honors reading in mathematics (TML, 59).

Quine’s own dissertation of 1932, “The Logic of Sequences,” was a reworking of roughly the first 500 pages of *Principia*, with its main innovation being a generalization of the theorems in Russell’s system so that they applied to relations with any number of relata.¹⁵ Despite the outwardly technical appearance of the dissertation, the philosophical point was clear in Quine’s mind: “[I]t aspired, like *Principia*, to comprehend the foundations of logic and mathematics and hence the abstract structure of all science” (TML, 85). We should be careful here to note that Quine’s talk of foundations is not meant to suggest some more traditional epistemological project aiming to yield certainty for logic and mathematics and so then for the natural sciences as a whole. Rather when Quine talks of foundations, he is suggesting the clarificatory sort of project that has guided his philosophy both early and late.¹⁶ Quine’s interest here is in the interconnections among the concepts of the various sciences and in whether these concepts actually stand up to scientific scrutiny.¹⁷

The basis on which Russell sought to construct the objects of mathematics, however, was not an extensional one of classes as is typically done nowadays but rather, was an intensional one—the fundamental objects being propositional functions, or what Quine often refers to as properties.¹⁸ With their lack of identity criteria, Quine finds such a basis for mathematics (or for any science, for that matter) to fall short of the kind of clarity that scientific philosophy strives for. So in this way Quine sees Russell as running contrary to his own professed philosophical aims. The assumption of propositional functions, or properties, just leads us back into the obscurity of traditional metaphysics. Quine, however, clearly thought that there was much of value for scientific philosophy in Russell’s work. Quine’s approach, which we will see throughout this chapter, then, was not to reject it but to see if he could bring it up to the standards that scientific philosophy aspired to. Indeed, in also espousing Russell’s view that there is no “superfine brand of knowledge” that philosophy could offer beyond the natural sciences, Quine sought to give an account of propositions that only needed to meet the mathematical standards of the very science that they were a part of.

In his dissertation, Quine defines propositions by way of the primitive operation of predication, which he describes as a binary operation upon function and sequence, which then yields what he calls a *proposition*. Notationally, they are expressed simply by juxtaposing the two operands, ϕ and X , where ϕ is a propositional function and X a sequence. The propositional functions themselves are interpreted extensionally (1932, 3–5).¹⁹ This, Quine says, is all there is to a proposition: “Such is the manner in which propositions emerge in the present

system. A proposition is for us a construct, a complex, wrought from a function and a sequence by the undefined operation of predication” (1932, 38). Still, Quine recognizes that we might ask for more; we might reasonably think that a proposition is not just a formal construct:

But, it may be asked, what sort of thing is this product of predication? From the official standpoint of our system, it is to be answered only that it is whatever predication yields; and predication is primitive. Unofficially, we may say that by a proposition we mean exactly what one ordinarily means by the term; and, from this standpoint, we may describe predication as that operation upon function and sequence which renders that latter argumental to the former and produces a proposition. In the terms of the present system, thus, the proposition is logically subsequent to the function and argument sequence which enter it. This treatment, however, is quite independent of metaphysical and epistemological considerations. It is altogether indifferent to the present system if function and argument be construed as abstractions which are, in some philosophical sense, subsequent to the propositions from which they are abstracted; just as it is irrelevant that, from a psychological standpoint, propositions are pretty certainly prior chronologically to functions and sequences. *Nor, indeed, are we even concerned with maintaining that propositions are, in any absolute sense, logically subsequent to functions and sequences—mainly, perhaps, because we have little conception of what possible meaning such a statement might have.* The point is merely that it has proved convenient in the present system to frame our primitives in such a way that, for us, the proposition emerges as complex.

(1932, 38–9; *my emphasis*)

Here, we see Quine following Russell by appealing to developments in modern science, specifically mathematical logic, to address more traditionally philosophical concerns.²⁰ But Quine also highlights that there may be a number of philosophical concerns about propositions that his own approach does not address. Quine does not see this as a deficiency but rather as a benefit. Philosophical controversies over propositions, such as the ones he points out, are irrelevant to the mathematical development of propositions in his system. Engaging in these controversies, then, would only lead to the kind of stagnation that scientific philosophy had sought to avoid. His account is knowingly “independent of metaphysical and epistemological considerations.” As we see in the italicized sentence, Quine simply rejects that there is any absolute sense of what a proposition is. It need only meet the mathematical needs of the particular system of which it is a part.²¹ Success here is measured only by mathematics itself and not some prior philosophical conception of what a proposition is.

In *A System of Logistic*, the published version of Quine’s dissertation, he elaborates some on the philosophical concerns over propositions, addressing some

important issues from, he says, “the more philosophical side of logic” (1934a, 32). And here he brings us directly back to Russell’s intensional basis for logic. Quine explains how his own account of propositions yields clear identity criteria for propositions. Quine first explains that two propositions that are materially equivalent, that is, both true or both false, are indistinguishable from each other from within ordinary truth-functional logic. But this does not make all material equivalent propositions identical; if it did there would be only two propositions, the true and the false. This, Quine reports, was Frege’s solution. The alternative, however, seems far worse:

If on the other hand Frege’s conclusions be rejected, what is propositional identity to involve over and above material equivalence? *In seeking more exacting conditions of identity than material equivalence, danger is to be apprehended of having to leave the terra firma of algorithmic logic and tread more metaphysical ground*; the usual formal procedure, therefore, is to avoid the question by handling material equivalence as such and never mentioning the identity of propositions.

(1934a, 33; *my emphasis*)

Material equivalence keeps the logic extensional, and in accord with the aims of scientific philosophy, has the benefit of fending off what Quine deems a more metaphysical approach to propositions. Quine takes his account of propositions to make even further improvements, yielding an account of identity for propositions that goes beyond mere material equivalence but that remains wholly extensional. Identity just becomes a matter of identity between sequences, where two sequences x, y and z, w are identical if and only if $x = z$ and $y = w$. So Quine’s technique yields a more refined account of propositional identity but that does not force us to go beyond the extensional realm of mathematical logic (1934a, 33–4). In speaking a few pages earlier of his preference for an extensional account, he remarks—echoing Russell’s own use of logical techniques to critique metaphysics—that it “represents no actual impoverishment of logic, but only the elimination of useless lumber ...” (1934a, 31).²²

Quine’s technique here is typical of his philosophy. He finds some notion that is left wanting in terms of clarity or rigor but that also has some use in the system. He then appeals to his best science so as to try to make sense of the notion. Let us see next how this approach applies to C. I. Lewis when trying to make sense of experience.

II

In this section, I want to focus on C. I. Lewis as a scientific philosopher, and, as with Russell previously, how we can view Quine’s philosophy as developing out of and in reaction to Lewis. In particular, I will focus on Lewis’s notion of

experience and Quine's refinement of this notion through his introduction of observation sentences. While C. I. Lewis has been given much less prominence than Russell or Carnap as an influence on the young Quine, he was surely important.²³ And unlike Russell and Carnap, Lewis was Quine's teacher in the very literal sense, having been among his graduate instructors at Harvard, teaching Quine both epistemology and Kant.²⁴ Let me begin, as I did with Russell, by sketching the relevant aspects of Lewis's scientific philosophy.

Lewis opens his 1929 *Mind and the World Order* by observing the importance of recent developments in mathematics and the physical sciences for epistemology. In particular, with the drive towards axiomatization, he explains that philosophers informed by these developments have come to recognize the implausibility that the certainty of the first principles of mathematics or the sciences could be grounded in their self-evidence. The rise of non-Euclidean geometries along with their application in the sciences had shown that this was more a matter of postulation than one of self-evident truths being forced upon us. In being postulates, a science's first principles are instead chosen more or less arbitrarily in accord with the particular purpose at hand, that is, along pragmatic grounds.²⁵ Certainty, according to Lewis, is instead grounded merely in the definitive, or analytic, nature of the postulates (1929, vi–vii). So, as with Russell, Lewis sees philosophy as developing in accord with developments in modern science. Indeed, also like Russell, Lewis goes so far as to say that philosophy can offer no peculiar insights into reality beyond what natural science tells us:

But it is not the business of philosophy to go beyond space and time. And so far as true knowledge of the nature of reality depends on determining questions of phenomenal fact which are not yet settled, the philosopher has no special insight which enables him to pose as a prophet. We can do nothing but wait upon the progress of the special sciences. Or if speculate we must, at least such speculation is in no special sense the philosopher's affair.

(1929, 4)

So what then does Lewis see as the task for philosophy?

Most generally, he says that philosophy seeks to clarify what we already know. So, for example, we already have some notion of right and wrong, but philosophy can then provide us with the grounds for making a moral judgment. A similar approach has also been widely recognized in logic but much less so in metaphysics. Here, Lewis diagnoses this as a lack of clarity about what the proper task of metaphysics should be. He observes that metaphysical questions are often a confused mix of issues from the natural sciences and from the domain of philosophy proper. So, for example, in thinking about the nature of mind, we will surely have to look to developments in biology, chemistry, and psychology. But this will still leave certain maximally general questions untouched, specifically prior issues of interpreting or classifying what, for example, the mental is. It is this initial task

of setting up categories of interpretation that has its home in philosophy (1929, 3–5). But again, in accord with the practice of scientific philosophy, the setting up of such categories will still be responsive to new developments within science. But being prior to a scientific investigation in a sense, the development of such categories will always be philosophical in nature. Lewis is careful to note, however, that such work does not exclude non-philosophers:

It would, of course, be captious to reserve this problem of initial concepts to philosophers, even though we should remember that, since everybody is to be his own philosopher, this merely means reserving them as *general* problems. The expert in the scientific field will have his special competence with respect to them; but they are not his exclusive property, because they are to be resolved as much by criticism and reflection as by empirical investigation. Conversely, it would be pedantic if we should forbid the philosophic student to speculate concerning undetermined scientific fact.

(1929, 7, *Lewis's italics*)

Philosophy and the sciences work hand in hand. What distinguishes the philosophical problems is nothing more than their greater generality or abstractness.²⁶ Any metaphysics that attempts to do more than this, that tries to transcend ordinary experience, “stamps itself as thaumaturgy, and is false upon the face of it” (1929, 10).

So it is in its classifying and categorizing that philosophy finds its status as analytic, but what exactly does Lewis see philosophy to be classifying? Lewis takes his primary philosophical task to be an analysis of common experience, and in particular to provide an account of what the mind brings to experience—that is, how mind classifies or interprets experience—and “some other element, presumably independent of the mind’s activity and responsible for other parts or aspects of experience” (1929, 36). So it is this “other element,” what he calls the given, or data of sense,²⁷ that he takes philosophy to be categorizing. He describes the given as that element of experience, which has no dependence on our thought. He takes up the example of a fountain pen, which we might describe in various ways, depending upon our interests and background knowledge, as a cylinder, hard rubber, or a poor buy. All of this brings to the pen some interpretation of our purely sensory experience of it (1929, 49–50). In contrast, the given is that part of experience that “remains unaltered, no matter what our interests, no matter how we think or conceive.” Thus, this unalterability along with its purely sensory quality allows us to isolate the given even though we cannot describe it in any particular way: “we cannot describe any particular given as such, because in describing it, in whatever fashion, we qualify it by bringing it under some category or other, select from it, emphasize aspects of it, and relate it in particular and avoidable ways” (1929, 52). He concludes, that the given is in this sense “ineffable” (1929, 53). It is only by first applying our categories of interpretation to the given that any truth then becomes possible (1929, 240).

Not unlike Russell's intensional propositional functions, it now seems that Lewis has injected some unclarity into his account of experience with his talk of some mysterious ineffable given that philosophy seeks to conceptualize. How can this mysterious know-not-what have any explanatory role to play in a properly scientific philosophy? Indeed, as Quine sees it, talk of experience itself seems lacking in the kind of clarity scientific philosophy demands: "Experience really, like meaning and thought and belief, is a worthy object of philosophical and scientific clarification and analysis, and like all those it is ill-suited for use as an instrument of philosophical clarification and analysis" (1981a, 185).²⁸ For Quine, philosophy cannot achieve the standards of scientific clarity if it assumes terms that are in as much need of explanation as the terms it is supposed to explain. Terms like experience and the given stand in as much need of clarification as what they are trying to explain—that is, our knowledge of the world. How then does Quine clarify these terms so that he can bring philosophy closer to the standards of clarity and rigor demanded by science?

Quine, taking seriously Russell and Lewis's claims that there is no higher knowledge than what science itself has to offer, appeals, as he did in the case of propositions, to the full body of available scientific theory to provide an account of experience. In doing so, we will see that he has no need for talk of an ineffable given. This is not a term Quine sees any need to hold on to since by appealing to current scientific theory, he can pass by it and all of its unclarity.

Situating his discussion in the context of Russell and Carnap's attempts to provide science with foundation in pure sensory experience,²⁹ Quine observes that all motivation for such a project drops out once we realize that science does not stand on a foundation of unadulterated sense-data but rather has as its very task the organizing of this sensory intake. We find that we are "body minded,"³⁰ recalling our sensory experiences by way of the physical objects themselves. To Quine, this suggests that we should instead look to a physicalistic alternative to try to make sense of this earlier talk of experience and the ineffable given (1955, 252; 1995a, 15–6).

Appealing to what science has to offer, Quine recommends that talk of sensory experience can be replaced by talk of the class of all triggered sensory receptors in a given moment. This move is justified simply by appealing to current research in physiology and its account of how we interact with our environment by way of our senses. From this very humble beginning, Quine then goes on to describe how we get to something that we would more readily identify as full-blown scientific theory. So here we have an account of experience completely from within current science. There is no attempt to ground science in experience, but rather we have made the notion of experience sufficiently clear by appealing to the resources that science has to offer.

Now what of Lewis's talk of an ineffable given? Quine agrees with Lewis that this cannot be expressed by some sort of pure sense-datum language (1955, 253), but we can instead find an analogue to this in Quine's notion of an observation

sentence. Such sentences are directly associated with stimulations, meaning that assent or dissent to an observation sentence is outright when in the presence of the range of appropriate stimulations. As examples of such sentences, we have “Mama!” “That’s red,” and “That’s water.” Also, in being intersubjective—that is, that any other member of the linguistic community would likewise assent or dissent when also having these stimulations—they are the vehicles for evidence (1992, 5).

Importantly, the observation sentences are not just the vehicles for evidence, but are also the entering wedge into language. And here we can see something of what might have been right about Lewis’s ineffable given. Since observation sentences are directly associated with stimulation, this allows the child to begin to acquire language without having any prior language. And we can hardly think of these sentences as being theoretical. They are just responses to certain stimulations and are taken holofrastically, that is, taken as wholes rather than word-by-word. At this point, such sentences are theory-free. In a much less mysterious way, this seems to capture what Lewis was getting at with his ineffable given. Only upon then taking such sentences analytically, that is, word-by-word, do we come to see that such sentences are also theory-laden. We come to recognize that the individual words reappear in theoretical contexts, for example, that “water” will appear in sentences along side “H₂O.” Retrospectively, then, our observation sentences are indeed theory-laden, but we only come to see this with greater linguistic sophistication (1992, 7; 1996, 477). So here we have Quine making physicalistic sense of Lewis’s mysterious ineffable given. There is no ineffable given, and as Lewis *rightly conceived*, there is no sense-datum language to go with it either. There are only the stimulations of our sensory surfaces and the directly associated observation sentences. So again, we see Quine not so much as doing away with the philosophy of his teachers as he is clarifying it so as to make it more fully scientific.

III

In this final section, I turn all too briefly to Quine’s greatest teacher, Rudolf Carnap, for it was he who, Quine said, provided “for the first time an example of what a scientific philosopher might aspire to in the way of rigor and explicitness” (Quine and Carnap, 1990, 462; Quine, 1970, 40). Despite coming as close as anyone ever would to establishing a completely scientific philosophy,³¹ Carnap, too, left work to be done, particularly with regard to one of the most enduring distinction in the history of philosophy—that between the analytic and the synthetic. Quine and Carnap’s debate over this issue is complex and so my account here will be of a rather general sort, brushing over many of the subtleties of both Carnap’s and Quine’s respective positions. I will focus on bringing out how Quine views the distinction as the final obstacle to be overcome in realizing a fully scientific philosophy.

Carnap, like Quine, and possibly even more so, took Russell as an important philosophical influence, and specifically, the vision of philosophy he sketched at the end of *Our Knowledge of the External World*. Carnap quotes these passages at length in his autobiography, remarking that he felt as if Russell was speaking directly to him (1963, 13) and fully embracing the idea that

The one and only condition, I believe, which is necessary in order to secure for philosophy in the near future an achievement surpassing all that has hitherto been accomplished by philosophers, is the creation of a school of men with scientific training and philosophical interests, unhampered by the traditions of the past, and not misled by the literary methods of those who copy the ancients in all except their merits.

(Russell, 1914a, 246)

Such a community of scientists and philosophers working together would bring about the desired return of progress to philosophy. And also like Russell, Carnap saw the elimination of more metaphysical approaches to philosophy as being replaced by a new scientific standard, which would make clear that only the statements of empirical science and mathematics have sense. Agreeing with Hume, Carnap urged that the metaphysical treatises be committed to the flames (1935a, 36). Russell was again central here to Carnap's thought as it would be through logical analysis that metaphysical pseudo-problems could be exposed. Indeed, all that was to remain of philosophy was the logic of science (1934, xiii). In this way, Carnap makes explicit and precise one way in which we can understand Russell's claim that all philosophical problems are ultimately problems of logic (1934, 7–8, pt. V). But what then of logic itself? How is our knowledge of logic to be explained? For Carnap, in a sense, it is not.

A central problem for empirically inclined philosophers was always how to account for the putatively a priori sciences, logic and mathematics being paradigm cases. Kantian intuition had been ruled out and Russell's fundamental relation of acquaintance hardly seems an improvement.³² According to Carnap, sentences of logic and mathematics, which he calls the formal sciences, are to be reckoned the analytic sentences, those sentences of a language that are true purely by way of the structure of the language we have adopted.³³ Sentences of the usual empirical sciences, which he calls the factual sciences, are the synthetic sentences, those sentences whose truth-values are left indeterminate by way of the rules for the language alone (1935a, 53). This account does not really explain the truth of logic and mathematics, at least in any robust sense. What it does do is provide an account of the difference and relationship between the formal and factual sciences, which Carnap sums up:

Science uses synthetic and analytic statements in the following manner. The factual sciences establish synthetic statements, e.g., singular statements for the

description of observable facts or general statements which are introduced as hypotheses and used tentatively. From the statements thus established the scientists try to derive other synthetic statements, in order, for instance, to make predictions concerning the future. The analytic statements served in an auxiliary function for these inferential operations. All of logic including mathematics, considered from the point of view of the total language, is thus no more than an auxiliary calculus for dealing with synthetic statements. *Formal science* has no independent significance, but is an auxiliary component introduced for technical reasons in order to facilitate linguistic transformations in the *factual sciences*. The great importance of the formal sciences, that is of logic and mathematics, within the total system of science is thereby not in the least denied but instead, through a characterization of this special function, emphasized.

(1935b, 127; Carnap's italics)

Carnap's logic of science, in this way, is meant to make precise the traditional distinction between analytic and synthetic (1935a, 53–4; Quine and Carnap, 1990, 430). By placing the logical and mathematical statements firmly among the analytic ones, Carnap shows that, despite their lack of empirical content, they are part of science. The analytic statements, the statements of formal science, are true simply by way of their role as the framework for the language of science that we have chosen. There need be no appeal to mysterious faculties of intuition or acquaintance to account for our logical and mathematical knowledge.

But has Carnap really succeeded in the way he thinks he has? On Carnap's view here there is the distinction between analytic and synthetic and then by way of his logic of science program he sets out to make this distinction precise. But should we grant Carnap this distinction between analytic and synthetic at all? Quine thinks not.

Quine provides many arguments against the analytic/synthetic distinction in his 1951 "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," but since section 4, "Semantical Rules," is the one most clearly aimed at Carnap, I will focus here. For the analytic/synthetic distinction to be part of scientific philosophy, we must not just be able to explicate the distinction but also provide an account of its relevance to epistemology (1986, 207). Its relevance, as we have seen, was in providing an account of the putatively a priori bits of knowledge. So, by Quine's lights, does Carnap show the distinction to be epistemologically relevant? Quine begins section 4 by explaining that the difficulty about drawing a boundary between analytic and synthetic has been thought to be a problem about the vagueness of ordinary language—that once we look to artificial languages with all of their precision to draw the distinction, the boundary between analytic and synthetic becomes clear. As we saw, this appears to be Carnap's position: there is a distinction between analytic and synthetic, which has long been used by philosophers, and the only real problem is to make it precise enough so that it measures up to scientific standards. But as Quine sees

it, shifting the problem to artificial languages leaves us no better off than where we were in our ordinary language. What we want is some account for statement S of language L that tells us under what conditions S is analytic for L .

Suppose we look at artificial language L_0 , which includes explicit semantic rules that tell us which statements of L_0 are analytic. This procedure certainly makes clear which statements are analytic, but it hardly tells us what is significant about them—why these statements are analytic rather than those. As Quine makes the point:

The rules tell us that such and such statements, and only those, are the analytic statements of L_0 . Now here the difficulty is simply that the rules contain the word “analytic,” which we do not understand! We understand what expressions the rules attribute analyticity to, but we do not understand what the rules attribute to those sentences.

(1951, 33)

Perhaps instead, he suggests, we should just think of “analytic-for- L_0 ” as a new symbol being defined by the rules. But then the same problem reappears since this new symbol

might better be written untendentiously as “ K ” so as not to seem to throw light on the interesting word “analytic.” Obviously any number of classes K , M , N , etc. of statements of L_0 can be specified for various purposes or for no purpose; what does it mean to say that K , as against M , N , etc., is the class of “analytic” statements of L_0 ?

(1951, 33)

As another attempt at analytic, Quine suggests that since we do know at least that the analytic statements are true, we might just identify the analytic ones as those among the truths that are true by way of the semantical rules alone. But now we just push the problem of the significance of “analytic for” off to “semantical rule of.” We have some truths labeled as “semantical rules,” but what now is the significance of such a label? The point can be readily seen by considering postulates in mathematics. The postulates are those statements selected from among the truths of the theory, say of Euclidean geometry, but the selection is largely arbitrary, guided perhaps minimally by some specific purpose that we might have had in mind. With some other purpose in mind, we could just as easily have selected some other truths as the postulates. We know which truths are the postulates because we have so labeled them, but there is nothing more significant to being a postulate than this. The same would go for those truths that we have selected as the semantical rules (1951, 34–5). “Semantical rules determining the analytic statements of an artificial language,” Quine concludes, “are of interest only in so far as we already understand the notion of analyticity; they are of no help in

gaining this understanding” (1951, 36). Since we cannot seem to draw any clear boundary between the analytic and the synthetic, there is no way that this supposed distinction can do anything to explain our putatively *a priori* knowledge. To continue to hold on to such a distinction in the face of this is simply to commit ourselves to “an unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith” (1951, 37).

Quine’s solution to all of this, perhaps his “bright replacement” (1991, 393), was of course holism—“that our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body” (1951, 41). All sentences of our theory are interconnected, which include those of both logic and mathematics and those of natural science. What explains our unwillingness to revise logical and mathematical truths is not their putatively *a priori* status, but rather their general applicability. In light of some recalcitrant data we do much better to revise some statement that will make the least disturbance in our theory overall (1951, 42–4). Here we have an account of logic and mathematics that makes neither appeal to mysterious notions of intuition nor to a scientifically unjustified distinction between analytic and synthetic.

To conclude, let me come back to something I had emphasized at the outset of this chapter. Perhaps Quine’s response here is a bit of a disappointment to many contemporary analytic philosophers, that many of them would demand more from a philosophical account of logic and mathematics. Quine’s solution seems to drain the philosophical endeavor of much of what made it special, of what distinguished it from the natural sciences. Denying this distinction, of course, is much of the point of Quine’s philosophy generally, and he found nothing disappointing about it. By bringing philosophy into the bounds of natural science, we gain that kind of progress in philosophy that the scientific philosopher always sought, avoiding the “empty wrangling” of the past (Carnap, 1935a, 81).³⁴ We give up on the unempirical dogmas and other metaphysical articles of faith that had led to philosophy’s stagnation. Quine would of course welcome the banishment of metaphysics,³⁵ but to the extent that such banishment rests on, for example, the analytic/synthetic distinction, such banishment, too, would be a piece of metaphysics; it falls outside the confines of what our best scientific theory can offer. Quine, I think, would have much the same to say with regard to many other topics that more recent analytic philosophy has focused on—for example, modality, mental content, or meaning. It is not enough for him that we address such issues by appealing to the results of current science; say those of formal logic or of neuroscience. The basic concepts of philosophy themselves must meet the standards of rigor and clarity demanded by science. That Quine’s views on such topics have been largely negative or even absent is not something we should see as lacking in his philosophy. Rather, it indicates our own failure to appreciate how far contemporary analytic philosophy has come from the aims of those early practitioners of scientific philosophy. In this way, Quine’s views are much closer to those of the early analysts, pragmatists, and logical empiricists who were part of

the tradition of scientific philosophy than they are to the views of the analytic philosophers of today.

In a sense, from Quine's perspective, the final overcoming of metaphysics for scientific philosophy is the realization that metaphysics cannot be overcome. What we can do is fold what remains of metaphysics firmly into a philosophy that is continuous with natural science. This is neither a return to the freewheeling metaphysics of the past, nor a welcoming of present-day analytic metaphysics. In blurring the supposed boundary between speculative metaphysics and natural science, Quine brings scientific philosophy to its completion (1951, 20). There is to be no fixed boundary between philosophy and natural science, as he explains:

The same motives that impel scientists to seek ever simpler and clearer theories adequate to the subject matter of their special sciences are motives for simplification and clarification of the broader framework shared by all the sciences. Here the objective is called philosophical, because of the breadth of the framework concerned; but the motivation is the same. The quest of a simplest clearest overall pattern of canonical notation is not to be distinguished from a quest of ultimate categories, a limning of the most general traits of reality.

(1960, 161)

A limning of the most general traits of reality is a metaphysical endeavor if ever there was one, but when done from within the confines of our current best scientific theory, it is equally a scientific one. It is here that we can see how a community of researchers "with scientific training and philosophical interests" can make sense of and pursue the philosophical issues of the past so as to make philosophy a truly scientific undertaking.

Notes

- 1 My title plays on Hilary Putnam's "The Greatest Logical Positivist," especially p. 269, where he argues that Quine was not so much a destroyer of logic positivism as he was one of its greatest practitioners. Warren Goldfarb, in a more lyrical setting, has also noted Quine's close connection to logical positivism, referring to Quine as "the very model of a modern neo-positivist" (www.wvquine.org/08-wvq-2008-06-25-oberlin-program.pdf). I think there is much that is correct in understanding Quine in this way. I have sought in this chapter to broaden this way of thinking about Quine as part of the scientific philosophy movement more generally.
- 2 Both Kemp (2014) and Rosen (2014) make this point. I should note that I am very sympathetic to the reading of Quine that Kemp offers.
- 3 This tradition has been receiving some attention in recent years; see Friedman (2012) and Richardson (1997) and (2003).
- 4 See for example, his (1995b, 461). In this essay he does espouse something he identifies as naturalism. Another way of characterizing my reading of Quine is that his naturalism is the high point of scientific philosophy. For some indication of his commitment to scientific philosophy, see his (1979, 193) and (1970, 40). I do not know anywhere in

his writings where he talks much about analytic philosophy as a view. He is unimpressed by attempts to classify his own work as part of the pragmatist tradition; see, for example, his (1981b, 190), (1985, 415), and (1991, 397). In the latter paper, he discusses C. I. Lewis and makes no connection to pragmatism, the tradition Lewis is most often associated with. This just goes to show Quine's lack of concern with labeling philosophical positions. See Godfrey-Smith (2014) for a reading of Quine that does place him within the pragmatist tradition. For a more critical view of this assimilation of Quine to the pragmatist tradition, see Sinclair (2012).

- 5 See Richardson (2003) on the relationship of pragmatism to scientific philosophy.
- 6 Rosen suggests Quine as the source for the revival of analytic metaphysics; see his (2014), 552.
- 7 For some suggestion of this see Dreben (2004) and Quine (1981a).
- 8 On this point especially, see Peter Hylton (2014, 152), though he makes the point by talking of Quine's naturalism.
- 9 Carnap characterizes metaphysics as follows: "'metaphysics' This term is used in this paper, as usually in Europe, for the field of alleged knowledge of the essence of things which transcends the realm of empirically founded, inductive science. Metaphysics in this sense includes systems like those of Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Bergson, Heidegger. But it does not include endeavors towards a synthesis and generalization of the results of the various sciences" (Carnap, 1932, 80). I take it that this characterization would be uncontroversial for all of Carnap, Russell, Lewis, and Quine. Quine, I will argue, however, thinks that his teachers had somehow stepped into this objectionable realm of metaphysics.
- 10 Here, I followed Friedman (2012) and Richardson (1997).
- 11 Russell published all of these works in 1914. I would argue that, while not made explicit until this point, the view of scientific philosophy had been with Russell for some time already, with the seeds for it being planted perhaps as early as his idealist period.
- 12 In praising Russell's increasing moves towards naturalism, Quine quotes most of this passage in his (1966, 83).
- 13 Since Russell's logical work is most relevant to Quine, I will focus here. But Russell also incorporated other scientific developments into his philosophy, such as those in modern physics and psychology. On psychology specifically, see Hatfield (2013).
- 14 We could, of course, challenge this assumption as unscientific, though I will not for the purposes of this section. I will, however, return to this point in section III.
- 15 In *Principia* they were proved only for a specific number of relata.
- 16 For more on this theme see my (2015). Continuing his reminiscences about his dissertation, Quine notes two contributions to clarity. The first the one I will discuss below, that is, how Quine comes to present a scientifically respectable account of propositions. The second he says was adhering carefully to use/mention distinctions, another failing of *Principia Mathematica* (1985, 85). I will not discuss the second, but it is also revealing as to what Quine thought the aims of philosophy to be.
- 17 For more on the latter point, see Hylton (2014) and Quine's response to Schuldenfrei (1981a). Quine takes the former point as being the primary success of logicism—showing the interconnections among the various branches of mathematics; see (1969b, 70). It is also the reason he welcomes projects that contribute to the unity of science more generally. I did not mention it previously, but Richardson also emphasizes unity as a central aim of scientific philosophy; again, see his (1997). I will not discuss this aspect here, but it, too, can be found in all of Russell, Lewis, Carnap, and Quine.
- 18 The story as to why Russell prefers propositional functions to classes is a complicated one, but see Hylton (1990, 288–9).
- 19 And as classes then, they have clear identity criteria, though Quine does not dwell on this point here.

- 20 I use science here in the broad sense that Quine and Russell would have, so that it is inclusive of logic and mathematics. Where a distinction is necessary, I add the qualifier “natural.”
- 21 For example, since Quine needs to show the logic of mathematical relations, propositions must be complex as opposed to primitive wholes.
- 22 Russell talks of using the principle of abstraction to “[clear] away incredible accumulations of metaphysical lumber” in (1914a), 51. Quine would use this phrase again in his paper of the same year, when discussing the elimination of propositions altogether from a system of logic (1934b, 269).
- 23 While some commentators note the importance of Lewis to Quine, few have done much work in exploring how Lewis might have been crucial to the development of Quine’s views. Recently, Thomas Baldwin has gone some distance towards remedying this oversight. See his (2007) and (2013). Robert Sinclair’s (2012) is also a recent contribution to this literature.
- 24 See Quine’s (1985, 82–3); by way of Davidson, Baldwin reports on the epistemology course (2007, 193).
- 25 Lewis sketches the situation with regard to geometry in some detail on pp. 241–4.
- 26 We should note how close Quine’s position is to this as expressed in (1960, 161).
- 27 He says these two terms are roughly synonymous, though does note that the latter has some slightly inappropriate connotations (1929, 55). Quine often prefers to speak of sense data, as it became probably the more accepted term in the philosophical literature generally.
- 28 Quine saw his own appeals to experience in (1951) in need of clarification if they were to meet the demands of his naturalism; see (1991, 398–9).
- 29 This may or may not be the correct way to understand Carnap’s *Aufbau* project (1928), and perhaps not Russell’s external world project either. But I will put that issue aside here. Quine does not mention Lewis in this context, but the discussion is certainly relevant to him, perhaps more so than to the other two figures; see Sinclair (2012).
- 30 Quine uses this expression in his (1974, 54).
- 31 Anyone other than Quine himself perhaps. Although I do not think that Quine would allow himself such self-praise.
- 32 My basic account here follows that offered by Richard Creath in his (1990) and his (1991). This particular setting is largely absent from Carnap’s philosophical work, but he does provide it in his (1963, 47 and 64).
- 33 More formally, Carnap says these sentences are consequences of the null class of sentences (1935a, 53).
- 34 Quine did not see his philosophical project as deflationary. By making it scientific, it is the paradigm for what our understanding or knowledge of the world should attain to. See, for example, his (1990).
- 35 For an early example see his (1936), 102, and for a later one see his (1954), 401.

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14

P. F. STRAWSON

Ordinary Language Philosophy and Descriptive Metaphysics

Hans-Johann Glock

This collection is devoted to the history of analytic philosophy. But whereas most recent collections on this topic assemble accounts of various periods and figures of the analytic tradition (e.g. Glock 1997; Beaney 2013), it has what one might call a historiographical or meta-historical focus. And by contrast to the equally meta-historical and meta-philosophical discussions of the “historical turn” in current analytic philosophy (e.g. Reck 2013), it revolves around the idea of *tradition-shaping interpretations*, interpretations that, according to the editor’s project description, were or are “crucial to the origin, development, and persistence of the analytic tradition in philosophy.” This is a novel and interesting move, and I am happy to pick it up. However, I do not subscribe to a view intimated in that quote and systematically developed in Aaron Preston’s *Analytic Philosophy: The History of an Illusion* (2007). It is the view that the analytic tradition in general and/or some or all of its standardly recognized branches have been exclusively or even predominantly *constituted retrospectively*, through interpretations by later commentators. In my view, these traditions, schools or movements do not or did not exist only or even mainly in the eye of the beholder. I have defended this position elsewhere (see Glock 2008, 151–3, the comment in Preston 2011 and my reply in Glock 2011). In the current context I simply alert you to the fact that I am not skittish about the sophisticated though orthodox approach to the historiography of analytic philosophy that has emerged through the aforementioned historical turn. As result I shall not stick to a meta-historiographical mode of writing, but construct my contribution around a historiographical account of the context of Strawson’s philosophy, its development and reception. And while I shall point out respects in which certain interpretations are wrong, misleading or one-sided, I shall regard them as innocent unless proven guilty.

The Linguistic Turn and “Ordinary Language Philosophy”

Keeping these provisos in mind, I shall approach my topic through two interpretations that have been tradition-*shaping* though not tradition-*constituting*, since both have a *fundamentum in rebus*. The first is the idea of the *linguistic turn*, initially mooted by Gustav Bergmann and canonized by Rorty’s eponymous collection (Rorty 1967, see 9). Taking that turn is not a precondition for being an analytic philosopher. Nonetheless, it marks a decisive development in the self-understanding of a major current within the analytic tradition, reaching from Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* through logical positivism, the later Wittgenstein and post-positivists like Quine and Davidson to contemporary conceptual analysts (see Glock 2008, esp. chs 2.4, 5.2, 8). What united these otherwise diverse figures is the conviction that traditional philosophical problems—especially those of metaphysics—are logical or conceptual rather than factual; they are ultimately rooted in misunderstandings of language rather than ignorance of reality. They should therefore be solved or dissolved not by collecting novel data or developing new empirical theories about the world, but through a clarification—logical analysis, paraphrasing, reform—of language.

Labels like “logical,” “philosophical,” and “conceptual analysis” had been rife since Russell and Moore. As part of the linguistic turn they were joined from the thirties onwards by “linguistic philosophy” and “the analysis of language,” which indicate the novel idea that logical and conceptual analysis have linguistic expressions—words, sentences, or arguments as their proper objects.

The second tradition-shaping interpretation links up immediately. It discerns two major strands within linguistic philosophy in this wider sense, namely *ideal language philosophy* and *ordinary language philosophy*. Between the 1930s and 1960s, British philosophy was dominated by a movement that was indebted both to Moore’s common-sense philosophy and to the ideas Wittgenstein developed in his move away from logical atomism after 1929. It included G. Ryle, J. L. Austin, H. P. Grice, N. Malcolm, R. M. Hare, S. Hampshire, H. L. A. Hart, D. Pears, P. F. Strawson, S. Toulmin, J. O. Urmson, and G. J. Warnock. Its opponents—for example Russell (1959, ch. 18; 1953), Gellner (1959), Bergmann (1954, 1960), Quine (1960, 261; 1976, ch. 14)—called it “ordinary language philosophy” or “Oxford philosophy,” since most of the members were based there. The precise origin of the label “ordinary language philosophy” is not known. Hacker speculates that it may have arisen from, though not originated with, Norman Malcolm’s influential paper “Moore and Ordinary Language” (1942) (Hacker 1996, 307 n. 38).

In any event, the first to contrast “ideal” and “ordinary language” philosophy was once again Bergmann, himself a paid-up logical positivist and self-avowed ideal language philosopher (Rorty 1967, 6–9, 15–24). The label “ordinary language philosophy” helped to stabilize and entrench an intellectual current into a recognizable tradition. Somewhat ironically, however, it did so in two contrasting ways. For the aforementioned analytic opponents, it established a convenient target—what contemporary post-modernists and post-analytic philosophers would call

“the other.” And among the philosophers thus targeted, it precipitated or strengthened a sense of identity and a certain *esprit de corps*. But it is crucial to note that this sense of identity included an insistence on diversity as a core element. Grice speaks not just for most members of the school but also for informed commentators when he insists that the term “ordinary language philosophy” does not designate a movement or school in any doctrinal or topical sense.

The only position which to my mind would have commanded universal assent was that a careful examination of the detailed features of ordinary discourse is required as a foundation for philosophical thinking; and even here the enthusiasm of the assent would have varied from person to person, as would the precise view taken (if any was taken) about the relationship between linguistic phenomena and philosophical theses.

(Grice 1986, 51; see also Grice 1958)

In the same vein, both Hacker (1996, 228–9) and Warnock (1998) emphasize that post-war Oxford philosophy did not constitute a uniform school and that the label “Oxford ordinary language philosophy” was only used by opponents. Those to whom it was commonly applied preferred labels such as “conceptual analysis” or “linguistic philosophy.” For they regarded philosophical problems as conceptual rather than factual, and concepts as embodied in language. To possess a concept is to know the meaning of certain expressions; by the same token, concepts are neither mental occurrences nor entities beyond space and time, but abstractions from our use of words. Self-image and self-descriptions aside, there is a substantive reason for resisting the label “ordinary language philosophy.”

As Ryle pointed out, the term “ordinary” in the phrase “ordinary language philosophy” is intended to contrast with “non-standard” rather than with “technical” (Ryle 1953, 315–16). Thus, the ordinary language philosopher appeals to the standard or established as opposed to the non-standard or deviant use of words, but the latter may be non-technical or technical, depending on the philosophical question at hand. The label “ordinary language philosophy” is thus a misnomer if it is used, as it is often used by detractors, to mean that philosophy ought to concern itself only with everyday words and concepts.

The denomination “ideal language philosophy” is also misleading, albeit for different reasons. It has been and continues to be used for two fundamentally distinct projects. One should properly be called *formal semantics*. Its guiding idea is that formal logical calculi such as the first-order predicate calculus developed by Frege and Russell bring to light the logico-syntactic depth-structure of sentences of natural languages. Accordingly, logico-linguistic analysis explicates features and rules that shaped ordinary language all along. This idea, pioneered by the quest for an ideal notion in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and promoted emblematically by Davidson’s project of a “theory of meaning for natural languages,” must be distinguished from *logical constructionism* in the vein of Frege, Russell, Carnap, and

Quine. The latter is a revisionist rather than descriptive or explicatory endeavor. It tries to avoid the philosophical confusions allegedly engendered by ordinary languages by replacing the latter through an artificial ideal language, an interpreted formal calculus free of the perceived or actual shortcomings of natural languages, such as ambiguity, vagueness, referential failure, and category mismatches.

With these caveats, however, the opposition between conceptual analysis on the one hand, formal semantics and logical constructionism on the other is real enough, both (meta-)philosophically and historically. Conceptual analysts of the Oxford type tried to resolve philosophical problems not through substituting artificial terms and constructions for the idioms of natural languages, but through clarifying the latter. And they rejected the idea that such clarification will reveal ordinary language to be governed by a calculus of precise logical rules. More specifically, they described the ordinary uses of philosophically troublesome terms and contrasted them with their uses in philosophical theorizing. Such analysis may feature definitions of words and paraphrases of sentences; yet it does not revolve around the use of artificial logical calculi.

P. F. Strawson: The Received View

Enter our protagonist. A thumbnail version of the received view of his achievements as it has entered the history of analytic philosophy could run somewhat as follows.

Strawson, Peter Frederick (1919–2006) British philosopher, the leading member of the later phase of post-war linguistic philosophy at Oxford. Strawson made seminal contributions to philosophical logic, metaphysics, epistemology and meta-philosophy. He developed austere and abstract arguments in a lucid and elegant fashion. His early writings form part of ordinary language philosophy in so far as they criticize orthodoxies of logical analysis by reference to ordinary use. His later writings are constructive, and have led linguistic philosophy back to metaphysics along Kantian lines. During his final years, he tried to combine a “descriptive metaphysics” in the spirit of Aristotle and Kant with an anthropological naturalism inspired by Hume and Wittgenstein. In spite of these transformations, there is an abiding concern in his work, namely with describing the most general and pervasive features of human thought about the world, in particular the operations of reference and predication.

(See Glock 1999; see also Snowdon 1998, Sen and Verma 1995, Brown 2006)

At the risk of appearing old-fashioned and unteachable, this picture still appears to me to be roughly correct. At the same time, its central features, and in particular the account of the developments in Strawson’s thinking, raise interesting

exegetical and historical issues. What is more, some misinterpretations have become part of the folklore of analytic philosophy. In what follows, I shall address the phases of Strawson's work distinguished above in chronological order.

A Shooting Star of Conceptual Analysis

Immediately after returning to his *alma mater* in 1947, Strawson was recognized as what we would nowadays call a shooting star of post-war linguistic philosophy at Oxford. And *prima facie*, at least, his early writings appear to fit the bill of ordinary language philosophy as commonly perceived or misperceived. Strawson acknowledged his debt to his erstwhile teachers and later colleagues Ryle, Austin, and Grice. Admittedly, he also wrote, "I don't think that you will detect many traces of [the method of ordinary language philosophy] in my work" (Strawson 1995, 15, see 18). This is correct in so far as Strawson's *style* always differed slightly from that of Ryle and Austin. While his writings are lucid and elegant, they develop more austere and abstract arguments, focus less on specific expressions, and rely less on vivid examples. As regards *content*, however, Strawson's early work was emblematic of conceptual analysis in two respects. For one thing, it provided the most cogent defence of its methodology against ideal language philosophy (see below). For another, more than any other linguistic philosopher Strawson criticized in detail the orthodoxies of logical analysis, and he did so by reference to our actual linguistic practices. Both logical constructionism and formal semantics lie within the target area. For Strawson's early work provides the most sustained critique of the scope and limits of formal logic in philosophy, whether it be for the purposes of linguistic reform or for the discovery of depth-structure. He prosecuted this critique on two related fronts. First, he attacked the orthodoxies of logical analysis by invoking ordinary use. In his famous paper "On Referring" (1950), Strawson attacked Russell's theory of descriptions. According to Strawson, "The present king of France is bald" *presupposes* rather than entails the existence of the present king of France; that is, his existence is a necessary precondition of the statement's being either true or false. Since there is no present king of France, the statement is neither true nor false, rather than simply false. Strawson accuses Russell of confusing meaning, which is a feature of type-expressions, with reference and truth, which are features of the uses of expressions. "The present king of France is bald" is meaningful, even though its present use fails to make a statement that is either true or false. In later writings, Strawson separated his diagnosis of truth-value gaps from his central idea, namely, that "identifying reference" is essential to human speech. By trying to paraphrase away singular referring expressions of the form "the so-and-so," Russell misconstrues their distinctive role, which is to single out a particular thing as a topic of speech. By the same token, Quine's elimination of singular terms from his canonical notation in favor of quantifiers, variables, and predicates ignores the fact that the function of predicates can in turn be explained only by contrasting it with that of singular terms (Strawson 1971, chs 1, 3–4).

Strawson's discussions of singular reference and of presuppositions have left abiding traces in both linguistics and philosophy (see Beaver and Geurts 2014). They have become part of the staple diet both of introductory lectures in the philosophy of language and of histories of analytic philosophy. It is also noteworthy—and regrettable—however, that the current mainstream of debates about reference labors under the illusion that Strawson's ideas have been superseded by the direct reference industry (see, for instance, the paucity of references and the cursory nature of discussions in Russell and Graff Fara 2012; Lepore and Smith 2006). Nevertheless, the line of influence has not subsided completely. Strawson's ideas about reference and its contrast to predication have played a central role in the abiding developments of his descriptive metaphysics (notably Evans 1983 and Wiggins 2001).

Strawson explored further the scope and limitations of formal logic in his subsequent book, *Introduction to Logical Theory* (1952), in which he demonstrated that the predicate calculus—the weapon of choice for logical analysts—does not reveal the true structure of ordinary discourse. The gulf between the truth-functional connectives and the notions of ordinary discourse—notably between “ \supset ” and “if ... then ...”—is wider than commonly accepted. Natural languages are distorted by being forced into the Procrustean bed of the predicate calculus. More generally, formal logic is not a sufficient instrument for revealing all the structural (logical) features of natural languages, let alone of any conceivable language or of human thought (Strawson 1992, ch. 8).

By contrast to Austin, Strawson explicitly defended the methodology of ordinary language philosophy against ideal language philosophers like Frege, Russell, Carnap, and Quine. By contrast to Ryle's indignant rhetoric against Carnap, he did so in a fair-minded, sophisticated, and, in my view, compelling manner. Both ordinary and ideal language philosophers agree that philosophical problems are rooted not so much in factual ignorance or error about the world as in confusions and paradoxes that arise out of the way we speak about or conceive the world. But whereas ordinary language philosophers seek to resolve philosophical problems by clarifying our existing language through analyzing or describing it, ideal language philosophers seek to avoid them by reforming ordinary language. In the work of both Carnap and Quine, for example, logical analysis turns into logical *explication*. It replaces philosophically troublesome expressions or constructions through alternatives that serve the cognitive purposes of the original equally well while avoiding drawbacks such as obscurity and undesirable ontological commitments. For instance, talk about numbers can be replaced by talk about sets. Strawson argued that if philosophical problems originate in our actual linguistic framework—as ideal language philosophers granted—the introduction of a novel framework will merely sweep these problems under the carpet unless its relation to the old framework is properly understood. Once we have elucidated ordinary language, Strawson went on to say, we no longer require an artificial one. For the problems arise not out of ordinary language as such, but out

of its distortion and misunderstanding in philosophical theories (Strawson 1963; see also 1992, 34–5).

Rumours to the contrary notwithstanding, ordinary language philosophers did not object to specifically *philosophical* terms of art, their deployment as such, and even a cursory look at their writings shows that they themselves did not shy away from them (e.g. “language game,” “family resemblance concept,” “ostensive definition,” “category mistake,” “performatives,” “constatives”) (Grice 1958, 173; Urmson and Warnock 1969, 47). Strawson is no exception, witness “truth–value gap,” “identifying reference,” “presupposition,” “transcendental argument,” etc. What they objected to, rather, was the use of technical terms *without adequate explanation of their meaning*. And, as Strawson pointed out, these explanations would perforce need to be couched in terms already understood, and ultimately in ordinary terms of a mother tongue (Strawson 1992, 10–16).

In a controversy with Austin, Strawson attacked the correspondence theory of truth. The idea that truth consists in a correspondence between statements and facts is spurious. The statement that *p* and the fact that *p* are not two independent items in different ontological spheres related by correspondence, they “were made for each other.” To object that facts are what make statements true is merely to express a linguistic convention: the fact that *p* simply is what the statement that *p* (if true) states. The function of “true” is performative rather than descriptive: we use it not to ascribe any property to a statement, but to express agreement, to endorse, concede, or accede to what has or might be said. This is the account of Strawson on truth that still prevails in the literature (see Soames, this volume). But it ignores the fact that Strawson soon recanted the performative theory of truth, and, over the years, developed a sophisticated albeit sketchy version of a minimalist account of truth (see Künné 2003).

The Rehabilitation of Metaphysics

Halfway through the previous century, analytic philosophy was predominantly characterized by hostility or indifference towards metaphysics (Hacker 1997). It is a commonplace that since then analytic philosophy has completely overcome such inhibitions about metaphysics. One can distinguish four main sources of this sea change. In rough chronological order, these are Quine’s naturalistic project of pursuing ontological questions by spelling out the ontological commitments of our best scientific theories, Strawson’s “descriptive metaphysics,” the essentialist metaphysics derived from Kripke’s and Putnam’s realist semantics, and the Austro-Australian “truth-maker principle” (see Glock 2002). At the same time, however, it is a very special and in many respects novel conception of metaphysics that emerges from Strawson’s work.

Strawson’s rehabilitation of metaphysics in his landmark *Individuals* (1959) is no return to traditional or substantive metaphysics. Strawson distinguishes between “revisionary” and “descriptive metaphysics.”¹ “Descriptive metaphysics is content

to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world, revisionary metaphysics is concerned to produce a better structure" (Strawson 1959, 9). Strawson is interested in descriptive metaphysics, which differs from the kinds of enquiry pursued by the later Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophers after him not in "kind of intention" but in its greater "scope and generality." It seeks to "lay bare the most general features of our conceptual structure." The "close examination of the actual use of words" may be the only "sure way in philosophy," yet it is insufficient to reveal these "general elements" and "structural connections." For these are not visible in the motley of ordinary use, but lie "submerged" beneath "the surface of language" at "a deeper level" (Strawson 1959, 9–10; 1995, 15).

The idea that descriptive metaphysics scrutinizes conceptual structures beneath the surface of language may suggest that it pursues aims similar to those of Moore, Russell, the early Wittgenstein, and the logical positivists. Nothing could be further from the truth. Strawson later distinguished explicitly between "atomistic," "reductive," and "connective" analysis (Strawson 1992, ch. 2). Atomistic analysis seeks to break down concepts and propositions into components that are absolutely simple. Strawson regards atomistic analysis as "distinctly implausible" (Strawson 1992, 20). Reductive analysis tries to explain complex concepts in terms that are regarded as more perspicuous or less problematic from an empiricist or naturalistic perspective. Strawson resists this ambition on the grounds that the fundamental concepts with which descriptive metaphysics deals "remain obstinately irreducible, in the sense that they cannot be defined away, without remainder or circularity, in terms of other concepts" (Strawson 1995, 16). He favors *connective* analysis and thereby abandons the idea that philosophical analysis decomposes or dismantles a complex phenomenon, displaying its simple elements and their mode of composition (Strawson 1992, 17–19; 1995, 15–17). "Only connect": Strawson transposes E. M. Forster's maxim for the understanding of human life to the understanding of our conceptual framework. Descriptive metaphysics seeks "to establish the connections between the major structural features or elements of our conceptual scheme—to exhibit it, not as a rigorous deductive system, but as a coherent whole whose parts are mutually supportive and mutually dependent, interlocking in an intelligible way" (Strawson 1985, 22–3). Any conceptual explication or explanation of meaning will eventually move in a circle. But this does not entail that such explanations must all be trivial or pointless, for there are more or less illuminating circles.

Descriptive metaphysics is interested in elucidating not just any ordinary concept, but ones that are highly general, irreducible, basic, and in a special sense, non-contingent. These concepts are *general* in being categorial, that is, in subordinating numerous more specific concepts. Thus concepts of material objects or of events are genera for more specific concepts such as "table," "heap of sand," "river," "explosion," "birth." They are *irreducible* not in being simple and unanalyzable but rather in resisting reduction without circularity. They are basic inasmuch as

they are both pervasive and central to the framework of our actual mode of thought (Strawson 1992, 24). Finally, they are *non-contingent* in the sense that they are “limiting” or “necessary features in any conception of experience which we can make intelligible to ourselves” (Strawson 1966, 24, 44, 68; 1992, 26), that is, essential to our conception of the experience of self-conscious beings.

A question remains over the kind of necessity involved here. Propositions which Strawson takes to articulate the structural features of our conceptual scheme—for example, that there is no such thing as an experience without someone whose experience it is. Such articulations are necessary but are neither analytic nor synthetic *a priori* truths. What is the status of such propositions? Strawson’s answer is that “We are dealing here with something that conditions our whole way of talking and thinking, and it is for this reason that we feel it to be non-contingent” (Strawson 1959, 29). As Hacker points out, however, Strawson’s answer is inadequate. Our size, for example, conditions much of our way of talking and thinking, yet there is nothing non-contingent about it (Hacker 1997, 56–7). On behalf of Strawson, Hacker makes a suggestion that draws Strawson nearer to the later Wittgenstein. Propositions that articulate the structural features of our conceptual scheme are grammatical propositions, that is, expressions of rules for the use of words. Such rules are constitutive of the meaning of the words whose use they govern, and accordingly what contravenes them are not possibilities that nature cannot realize but violations of sense—that is, nonsense. The proposition that every experience is necessarily someone’s experience, then, expresses a rule constitutive of the very meaning of our term “experience,” and its modal status is explained by the fact that we would not *call* something an experience unless there was a subject whose experience it was.

This Wittgensteinian line is, however, less compelling in other cases. For instance, according to Hacker, “Every event has a cause” is a rule which partly determines what counts as an “event.” But our conceptual scheme does not simply rule out as nonsensical the expression “uncaused event.” Let’s assume that one morning we find dinosaur footprints on the ceiling. Let’s further assume that we have a reason to abandon the search for an explanation of the footprints, such as that the laws of nature not only fail to provide one but also suggest that none is to be had (the example of quantum mechanics shows that this is at any rate a possibility). Even in that case, we would not cease to call the appearance of the footprints an event. A *physical change* would be an event, even if a causal explanation of it could be ruled out *ab initio*. Consequently, being caused is not part of our explanation of the term “event” or of the linguistic rules governing its use.

Kant was right, therefore, to deny that the law of causality simply explicates the concept of an event. Insofar as it is less susceptible to falsification than common-or-garden empirical generalizations it is by virtue of being a regulative principle. A *qualified* version of it may also possess a constitutive role in our conceptual scheme (see Glock 2012). First, we need to acknowledge—contra Kant and Wittgenstein—that not all loosely speaking conceptual truths are trivial.

Next, some conceptual truths are non-trivial because they are not definitional. The connection between the constituent concepts of such propositions is provided by their complex interplay with other concepts, concepts which need not themselves occur in the propositions concerned. Thus in *Bounds of Sense* Strawson has argued powerfully (though perhaps not compellingly) that *most* events must be caused, not because random changes do not qualify as events, but because persistently chaotic events are not possible objects of self-conscious experience.

Experience, Particulars and Universals

Individuals starts out by considering preconditions of the possibility of mutual discourse between speaker and hearer. In *Bounds of Sense*, by contrast, we encounter a metaphysics of experience which is not just transcendental in its structure but genuinely Kantian in its materials.² Its starting point is in effect the possibility of self-conscious experience, of experiences that each subject can ascribe to herself (but see below). And its main thesis runs: a necessary precondition for ascribing experiences to oneself is the possibility of distinguishing between one's own experiences and an objective (mind-independent, non-chaotic and unified) world that they are experiences of. Some of our experiences are of *mind-independent* things, "objects in the weighty sense" (Strawson 1966, 73, 88). These "objective particulars," in the terminology of *Individuals*, exist independently of being spoken or thought about by anybody; they include material objects, persons, and spatio-temporal goings-on (processes and things).

At the same time, this familiar sketch of one of the most impressive edifices of analytic metaphysics requires qualification and modification in two important respects.

The first concerns a rarely noted aspect of *Bounds of Sense*. Some passages base the Kantian argument in favor of objective particulars on the self-ascribability of experiences (Strawson 1966, 28–9). Others, however, try to deduce the latter out of a yet more basic fact, namely the "conceptualizability of experience." It is part of the "standard-setting definition" of "experience" that it involves a "duality of general concepts, ..., and particular instances of general concepts" (Strawson 1966, 25, 20, see 47, 97, 271–2). Echoing Kant's famous dictum, Strawson declares: "*Thought* about the World requires general concepts; and thought about the *world* requires their application in particular instances" (Strawson 1975, 6). Concerning this even more basic stratum, the argument of *Bounds of Sense* therefore presupposes a line of thought that Strawson developed in the relatively underappreciated Part II of *Individuals* (see also Strawson 1974 and Glock 2012, 401–5).

The second complication arises in the context of these reflections. Strawson is rightly famous for having criticized central aspects of Quine's doctrine of ontological commitments (see Strawson 1997, chs 1–2; Glock 2003a, ch. 2). At the same time, he shares with Quine the idea that existence is linked to the existential assumptions of true propositions properly analysed. We investigate what there is by investigating both the things we refer to and the things we predicate of them in our actual discourse.

[W]e should ask: “What are the most general categories of things which we *in fact* treat as objects of reference or – what comes to the same thing – as subjects of predication and what are the most general types of predicates or concepts which we employ *in fact* in speaking of them?”

(Strawson 1992, 47)

In this context the contrast between the traditional task of metaphysics, and the remit of descriptive metaphysics seems to vanish; indeed, the order of priority between discourse (language, thought) and reality seems reversed. According to *Individuals*, the logico-grammatical subject/predicate distinction does not provide the “foundation” of the ontological particular–universal distinction, but the other way around (Strawson 1959, 161). Later Strawson declared it to be “central” to his reflections about reference and predication that “something in reality,” namely the “ontological or metaphysical distinction between *spatio-temporal particulars* on the one hand and *general concepts or universals* on the other” “underlies,” “accounts for,” or “sustains” the “formal distinction” of subject and predicate (Strawson 1995, 9; see also 1998, 383).

The apparent conflict with the better-known characterizations of descriptive metaphysics as a second-order conceptual investigation can be dissolved as follows. It is by reflecting on the prerequisites of thought and discourse that we come to realize the essential role of reference and predication. But that reflection shows that reference and predication presuppose objects of a certain kind, precisely because these objects alone can sustain or account for the functions.

In the final analysis, Strawson declares, the contrast between traditional and descriptive metaphysics, “though real, is not as great as it may look.” Whereas the former speaks of the “most general kinds of *things that exist* in the universe,” the latter speaks of “the most general concepts or concept-types ... which we employ in *thinking and talking* about things in the universe.” But “it is quite inconceivable that these concepts should have this pervasive or universal employment unless we took it for granted that there were, or existed, in the world things to which those concepts, or concepts of those concept-types, applied” (Strawson 1992, 33).

Scepticism: Transcendental Arguments and Naturalism

Such passages raise the question of whether the distinctions laid down in our extant conceptual scheme match objective differences in reality. They are closely connected, therefore, to a final aspect of Strawson’s work that has left a lasting albeit contested legacy, namely his various strategies for dealing with skepticism. The label notwithstanding, Strawson’s descriptive metaphysics is *not just* a descriptive inventory of our actual conceptual scheme. He also adopts a *validatory* stance. According to Strawson, certain features of our conceptual scheme are indispensable, and hence immune to the doubts of skeptics and the reforms of

revisionary metaphysicians. This Kantian strategy is also central to Strawson's epistemology, which has revived the idea of transcendental arguments. Such arguments aim to show that skeptical doubts are incoherent or self-refuting, because the skeptic questions the conceptual scheme in terms of which the skeptical problem is stated. He himself employs concepts which make sense only on the tacit assumption of conceptual connections he explicitly rejects. Thus skepticism about induction questions the rationality of predicting the future on the basis of the past. But inductive reasoning is not a method of predicting the future which can be assessed for its rationality, since it defines what counts as rational prediction: we call a prediction reasonable precisely if it is supported by previous experience (Strawson 1952, ch. 9). Similarly, skepticism about other minds employs the concept of other minds. But that concept makes sense only if one can distinguish between "my mental states" and "others' mental states," which in turn presupposes that our normal ways of telling that someone else is in a certain mental state must be "logically adequate kinds of criteria" (Strawson 1959, 105–6). More generally, the skeptic himself employs concepts which make sense only on the tacit assumption of conceptual connections he explicitly rejects. Therefore the skeptical position could not be stated unless it were unfounded.

He [sc. the skeptic] pretends to accept a conceptual scheme, but at the same time quietly rejects one of the conditions of its employment. Thus his doubts are unreal, not simply because they are logically irresolvable doubts, but because they amount to the rejection of the whole conceptual scheme within which alone such doubts make sense.

(Strawson 1959, 35, see 106, 109)

It has been objected, by Stroud (1968) in particular, that transcendental arguments establish at best that we must employ the concept of other minds, and that we must believe that concept to be satisfied when our criteria are met, not that the concept is actually satisfied by anything in reality.

In *Scepticism and Naturalism* Strawson conceded that transcendental arguments only establish connections within our conceptual scheme, not anti-skeptical conclusions about the existence of things. Nevertheless, skeptical arguments are idle: they cannot persuade us since we cannot help believing, for example, in material bodies or other minds. What unites Strawson's transcendental and naturalistic responses is this: the skeptical challenge is not refuted by reference to allegedly indubitable beliefs, but rejected on the grounds that it implies abandoning categories that are indispensable to human thought. "Having given up the project of wholesale validation, the naturalist philosopher will embrace the real project of investigating the connections between the major structural elements of our conceptual scheme" (Strawson 1985, 19).

But naturalism, as Strawson describes it, does not differ from the non-reductive analysis that always propelled his descriptive metaphysics. Furthermore, if the

skeptic abandons the preconditions of human thought, he suffers the kind of self-refutation that transcendental arguments were supposed to reveal. It would therefore be precipitate to rest content with a Humean naturalism, according to which the skeptical doubt is correct though impotent. Even if transcendental arguments cannot establish any “ontological” conclusions about reality, they may be able to silence the skeptic. *If* a transcendental argument can show that the skeptic employs concepts that are incompatible with his own doubts, then it prevents him from making a coherent contribution to the debate. That is not the same as proving that we have knowledge, but nor is it a second-best. To silence the skeptical doubt by means of argument is to resolve the philosophical problem that it poses.

Pursuing the twists and turns of Strawson’s philosophical endeavors reveals how complicated and sophisticated his ideas and their development were, and that they defy several entrenched prejudices, misunderstandings, and criticisms. On the other hand, they also display the kind of edifice for which Strawson is rightly famous. In particular, they illustrate Strawson’s claim that descriptive metaphysics combines logic, ontology, and epistemology as “three aspects of one unified inquiry” (Strawson 1992, 35, see 31; 1966, 47; 1998, 384). Of the four trends within contemporary analytic metaphysics mentioned above, Strawson’s work is currently least fashionable. But it was the first explicit and elaborate rehabilitation of metaphysics, the one that built most directly on the great metaphysicians of the past and the one which displays the most impressive combination of scope, cohesion, and sophistication. It may also be the one from which we ultimately stand to gain most. But that is a topic for another paper, one that looks forward rather than backward.

Notes

- 1 Ultimately, Strawson’s descriptive metaphysics should be understood through a *fourfold* contrast, namely not just with revisionary metaphysics and conceptual analysis, but also with a historicist conception of metaphysics, and explanatory metaphysics. See Glock 2012, 393–7.
- 2 Strawson’s interpretation of Kant was itself tradition-forming, constituting the most important impetus to analytic Kant scholarship. See Glock 2003b.

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15

AUSTIN ATHWART THE TRADITION

Kelly Dean Jolley

Introduction

Michael Dummett deems Frege's *Foundations of Arithmetic* "unquestionably the most brilliant sustained performance of its length in the entire history of philosophy."¹ I agree with Dummett. And I believe that J. L. Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia* (*S&S*) deserves a place on any such ranking—but not merely a place, a place close to Frege's book, close to the top of the list.

I realize that many will reckon I rank the book too highly. I am not going to argue about that in any direct way. But I am going to argue that one reason why it seems that I am ranking the book too highly is that even now it remains hard to recognize how revolutionary the book is, how strongly it swims against the stream of traditional epistemology. Proper recognition has been obscured by tendencies too-readily to categorize (and thus reduce) Austin and his style of philosophy. We take Austin to be an ordinary language philosopher—and we think we know what that means. We take Austin to be a defender, left-handed perhaps (bend sinister?), but still a defender, of direct realism. We take Austin to be the knight errant of the plain—the champion of the ordinary man. We are wrong about all of this. Recognizing that we are will, I hope, allow us to recognize *S&S* for the deep, radical, difficult, and hard-to-assimilate achievement that it is. Ordinary language philosophy seems easy to domesticate, partly because it seems to domesticate itself, as if its character of concern with the homely and familiar rendered it homely and familiar. It seems to be a style of philosophizing to the bottom of which it is easy to see. Whatever lessons it has to teach are such that she who runs may read, requiring nothing more ultimately than a concise dictionary and a slightly guilty linguistic conscience. It has no depths. It is all surface, superficialities. But perhaps we expect to learn the wrong lessons, and so

never really hear what ordinary language philosophy has to say. Perhaps we were trapped in Flatland. Ordinary language philosophy is a romance of many dimensions—like our ordinary lives. But it is hard to see anything we call ‘ordinary’ that way—particularly hard when philosophizing, but hard enough at all times.

Part One: A Beginner Among Beginners

Let’s start at the beginning. In fact, let’s start with beginnings. No philosopher other than Husserl has been more concerned with beginnings than Austin.² Austin begins and ends at the beginnings of things. The last line of *S&S* is about beginning: “The right policy is to go back to a much earlier stage, and to dismantle the whole doctrine before it gets off the ground.”³ That doctrine—the “general doctrine, generally stated”—goes like this:

We never see or otherwise perceive (or “sense”), or anyhow we never directly perceive or sense, material objects (or material things), but only sense-data (or our own ideas, impressions, *sensa*, sense-perceptions, percepts, etc.).⁴

I will return to that doctrine and its dismantling below, but for now I want to stay with Austin’s fixation on beginnings.

A quick look at the footnotes of *S&S* reveals that Austin nearly always quotes from or responds to the earliest pages of the work of other philosophers; he contests pages 1, 2 or 3. Austin’s work marathons to the starting line.

Austin has mastered philosophical openings. But he plays them so as to obviate the middle game and the end game—well begun is wholly done. Austin takes the errors that most matter in philosophy to be the ones that occur in the set-up, in the get-go: the ones that occur in the preliminary work that is supposed to be beneath philosophical notice, because it creates or supports what will be worthy of philosophical notice. But for Austin, *nothing is beneath philosophical notice*—and this states a crucial discipline of ordinary language philosophy. Nothing—in particular, no word—is beneath philosophical notice.⁵ Each and every word stabs. Thrust and parry begins at the beginning, with the first word. And Austin is always about the first word. He crowds that word, demanding that it earn its keep, its space on the page. But Austin’s verdictive posture toward words simply displays the other face of his humility toward words, his expansive, patient watchfulness of their linguistic behaviors, his good shepherding of words, and his effort to return each stray to the fold.

Austin’s resolve to be a beginner among beginners makes him maddening to many readers. His responses often strike his opponents as curiously external, perhaps question-begging, almost certainly premature. He seems to be systematically depriving the philosopher of any means of expression, almost as if he were performing a perverse Monty Python routine, imitating, in ridiculous fashion, each

word the philosopher says, exaggerating it as he shrilly repeats it, and so depriving it of any meaning. (“Real? *Real?* *Reeeally?*”) But Austin is convinced that much that we take to be the experience of meaning turns out to be only our experience of meaning to mean. Like Frege before him, Austin takes it to be possible to intend to mean something and to be convinced that you do while all the time you do not. Austin requires the philosopher to earn his bread crumb by crumb, to earn his claims word by word. Nothing in philosophy is free. There is no free lunch. Not just every solution, but every problem has to be earned. You cannot assume that there is a problem and then go on to solve it. You have to show that there is a problem. You have to prove there is a problem before you can attempt to prove your answer to it. Austin’s espousal of this requirement is partly what makes his work seem curiously external. We tend to sort among and judge philosophers by their responses to problems, by the subtlety, creativity, and probative force of their responses. Austin sorts and judges them by their responsiveness to the requirement to earn their problems. We are all too willing to believe that philosophical problems can be hand-me-downs, that they can be bequeathed to us by those who went before us and “discovered” them. But that is a mistake. We have to discover them for ourselves. We have to carefully consider the supposed discoveries of them by our predecessors, deciding whether or not they did really discover a problem or whether something else happened—say, the making of a ground-floor, first-water mistake. The point is not that no problem can be or has been discovered: it is that we need to see whether one has been. It’s funny: since Descartes, at least, philosophers have paid lip service to the idea that beginnings should be assumption-free, presuppositionless. But again and again philosophers take their problems as if they are free, presuppose the problems.⁶

Importantly connected to getting nothing in philosophy for free is something else crucial to understanding S&S: Austin is not trying to falsify his target, not at the end of the day. Austin does not think that sense-datum theories are false. He does not think that they are true. He thinks that they all “bite off more than they can chew.”⁷ They are not coherent, although they present a veneer of coherence. Austin strips them of that veneer. This crucial feature of Austin’s practice proves incredibly hard for readers to take seriously. They all know he *says* he will not—since he cannot—decide about the truth or falsity of these theories. It is the very first thing he says. But few readers believe him. Before long, they have Austin plumping for the truth or falsity of the theories. Partly this happens because—although, again, Austin plainly denies the classification—readers cannot see how Austin could fail to be a direct realist, given his target. But thinking this requires thinking that sense-datum theories do not bite off more than they can chew. It requires thinking that sense-datum theories are coherent, and coherent in a way that allows them to create a negative dialectical space for a rival theory, like direct realism. But Austin does not think that sense-datum theories are coherent; they cannot structure any dialectical space, positive or negative. There is no alternative to sense-datum theory because, in the final accounting, there is no sense-datum

theory. Nothing is alternative to nothing. But what happens regularly is that Austin is taken to be a double-super-secret crypto-directo realist.⁸ But Austin takes himself to reveal that the supposed dialectical space inhabited by the rival theories does not exist. Direct realism's eyes are bigger than its stomach too.

For Austin, philosophical theories are always accepted as denials of rival theories. The denial is not always explicit, or even always fully available to the person who accepts some theory, but it is there. For Austin, then, acceptance of direct realism occurs as a denial of sense-data theory. (The pesky word "direct" in the title shows that to be so.) But a theory can only be denied where it is taken to be coherent, to make some sense. (Adding a tilde to a string of symbols that is not well formed does not negate the string of symbols, it simply adds another symbol to the ill-formed string. No logical operation can be performed on nonsense.) For Austin, then, attacking the coherence of sense-data theories is tantamount to attacking the coherence of direct realism. So, he cannot sensibly advocate direct realism while attacking sense-data theories.

Part Two: The Plain Person and the Philosopher

One of Austin's most impressive accomplishments in *S&S* is one that he is often faulted for—but I will have to make that clear. Look at the early sections of Lecture II. Austin quotes at length from Ayer. The rest of *S&S* is extended commentary on that quotation. Ayer introduces a contrast between the philosopher and the plain person—and Austin seizes on that contrast. But note this well: *Austin does not introduce the contrast.* Ayer does. Austin seizes on what has been introduced but is not responsible for its introduction. I stress this because Austin is so often treated as if his work in philosophy could be contracted into the space of one claim: the plain person is right, the philosopher wrong. But, first, it is not Austin who introduces the contrast between the plain person and the philosopher; second, Austin is not championing the plain person—he is deconstructing Ayer's contrast. Austin reckons that Ayer gets the plain person wrong—but Austin is not arguing that the plain person is right.

But why does Austin seize on the contrast? Is it Austin's cherishment of the plain, the ordinary? Is it Austin's holding a brief for the plain person?

No. Austin seizes on the contrast because it is a discovery about the problem of the external world. Austin has discovered that the contrast plays a crucial role in the problem. The contrast is not an accidental feature of Ayer's approach, a simply eliminable rhetorical strategy. Instead, the contrast is a part of the problem.

When the philosopher presents the problem of the external world, he or she is motivating a doubt about the existence of the external world (thus is the external world rendered "problematic"). But motivating that doubt is not easy; the doubt seems strange, exaggerated, unreal. (Even the philosopher concedes a certain strangeness or exaggeration or unreality here, calling the doubt (for example) "metaphysical" or "hyperbolic."⁹) And so the philosopher presenting the problem

will make the doubt less strange, less exaggerated, more real, by claiming that the doubt differs from plain or ordinary doubt in degree, but not in kind. (Think of this as securing the doubt's *bona fides*.) The idea is that doubt of the kind that Descartes fosters with the Evil Demon argument is supposed to be on the far end of a continuum of doubt whose near end is doubt of the kind familiar to the plain person—say, my doubt about whether there is someone outside in the dark and fog, or whether my eyes are playing tricks on me. We all have moments of doubt of this kind—but is the doubt Descartes wants to foster of the same kind (but just of a higher degree, plain doubt amplified to 11)?

The doubt Descartes wants to foster seems, as I have said, decidedly unreal, as if it is not doubt, really, at all, as if it is not intelligible as doubt, as anything, really. But if that doubt can be situated on a continuum with plain doubt (like the doubt about my eyes playing tricks on me), then the doubt can plausibly be claimed to share in the reality and intelligibility of plain doubt. Perhaps the reality or intelligibility of plain doubt gets attenuated in the case of metaphysical doubt, but it is still there, even if stretched thin.

I want to look more closely at Lecture II now. Austin is amused by the fact that Ayer, in the passage Austin quotes, presents himself as a plain person. Here is Austin's introduction of the passage:

Let us have a look, then, at the very beginning of Ayer's *Foundations*—the bottom, one might perhaps call it, of the garden path. In these paragraphs, we already seem to see the plain man, here under the implausible aspect of Ayer himself, dribbling briskly into position in front of his own goal, and squaring up to encompass his own destruction.¹⁰

Note the humorous and effective soccer imagery, but also the kick Austin delivers at the end. Ayer, from Austin's point of view, presents the plain person as doing something to himself as bizarre as a soccer player dribbling into position in front of his own goal, and squaring up to score against himself—to "encompass his own destruction." Austin's claim here is that Ayer's representation of (himself as) a plain person represents that person as bent on self-destruction.

Austin declares there are five separate problems to be considered when evaluating the contrast between the plain person and the philosopher.¹¹ I want to consider only the final three, since they each directly relate to the general point I have been making. I will roll two of the problems into one in the next section.

Room for Doubt?

The first point is the supposed naiveté of the plain person. He or she is just a bit slow, a bit behind, a bit inattentive. The plain person would see what the philosopher sees if he or she were a bit more sophisticated. Whatever the (de)merits of this claim, notice that it puts the plain person and the philosopher on a

continuum of degrees of sophistication. The doubt of the plain person is doubt that is available to the naive or unsophisticated; the philosopher's doubt (though of the same kind) is not naive, sophisticated.

A measure of the plain person's naiveté is the person's failure to realize that there is room for doubt even in cases where the person feels none at all. Imagine that Bob is standing in his backyard, at arm's length from his familiar lawn chair—standing in the nearly dazzling light of the high noon sun. In such a case, Bob will take himself to know his chair is before him, to see it. But, Ayer contends, Bob is a bit naive. A philosopher in the same position as Bob, say, Ayer himself, will exert his sophistication by recognizing that even here there is room for doubt—a doubt that should make him worried about claiming to know his chair is before him, to claim that he sees it. Not only would Ayer recognize room for such doubt, he would recognize that the room for doubt is always there, preventing the chair from crowding Bob or Ayer into knowledge. As Austin points out, the lines from John Locke (internal to the quoted passage from Ayer) contend that the degree of certainty Bob would have in such a case—while as great as Bob can command and as he would ever need to command—is a degree of certainty compatible with his being mistaken, wrong, about his chair being before him. Bob has the certainty needed to bring him to sit, but not to bring him to know. (A doggish certainty?)

Austin regards this as a false suggestion (*suggestio falsi*). The plain person, Bob, is not unsophisticatedly missing out on the limitation of his certainty—sitting down in doubtless, and so dubious, naivete. Rather, to suggest to Bob that there is room for doubt here would be regarded by Bob as nonsense. Such a doubt would not be a greater degree of plain doubt; such a doubt would be plain crazy: different in kind (nonsense as opposed to sense), not just in degree. These conditions—high noon sun, backyard, chair—, these conditions are not the conditions of a high degree of certainty, but with room left over for doubt. These are the conditions in which Bob knows, the conditions (in this case) of knowledge.¹²

Deceived by the Senses?

But couldn't the testimony of Bob's senses be false, couldn't his senses deceive him? No. Of course there are cases when, as Bob might put it, "his eyes play tricks on him." But that phrase is a synecdoche, as the phrase "my senses deceived me" is a metaphor.

Ayer pictures Bob (and himself, and everyone else) as if he were a submariner captaining his body as a submarine, submerged in the surrounding environment. In such a picture, Bob's senses are to be treated as if they were sensors, gauges, meters—his way of finding out what the surrounding environment is like, what is going on *out there*. Pictured this way, our senses would indeed "tell" us things, "indicate" how things are—like the depth gauge in an actual submarine.

But I am not in my body as a submariner is in a submarine. (This needs to be said again and again.) I am (in) my senses. (*I exist my sensitive body.*) I do not interact with my senses; I interact with chairs, tables, phones, other people. I do not “read” my senses. In the right circumstances, I see (or hear or touch or taste ...) the things I encounter in my non-bodily circumstance. Or, shifting pictures slightly: my senses are not gossips or tattle-tales—they do not “bear tales” about chairs, or “tell on” chairs (for their wanton chairishness?). They do not seek us out to bring us reports out-of-school. My senses tell me nothing. They do not speak. As Austin says—*my senses are dumb*.

Though Austin does not use this way of making his point, and although there are dangers aplenty in putting it this way, it is important to remind yourself and to keep reminding yourself that we are conscious of chairs and tables and other people, rainbows and shadows and holes. Our senses are determinate forms of our consciousness of such things. We are not conscious of our senses. My consciousness cannot “get behind” my seeing, behind my eyes; my consciousness cannot withdraw to some subdermal cavity and from that secreted place keep tabs on tactation. My consciousness cannot get behind anything—it is itself as *out there* as anything else.

To tell the plain person that his senses deceive him—and to mean that literally, anyway non-metaphorically—would bemuse him or her. Bob is not going to think that his senses could be deceiving him, because there is no room for any sensory shenanigans—no dark, no fog. And even if there were dark and fog, and even if he were to say that his senses deceived him, Bob would not blame them: he means that he got confused, could not tell what he was seeing.

The thing Ayer wants—and Descartes wanted it before him—is to have us acknowledge a “distance” between ourselves and our senses. This “distance” is the room for doubt—or it is some of the room for doubt. My senses “testify,” and I, lawyer, juror and judge, cross-examine my senses, reach a verdict on their testimony, and pass sentence on a world I did not and do not witness: *j’accuse!* But this tribunal model confuses us. There is no distance between ourselves and our senses—we are as close to the world as they are. Indeed, ultimately there is no *we* and *they*.

Direct Realism?

Austin’s comment that the senses are dumb is easy to misunderstand. I have been trying to help. Keep in mind that he is in effect rejecting a way of picturing the senses—as “telling” us things about chairs and suchlike. He is not accepting that picture and then telling us that we are entrapped in sensory silence—as if our senses were supposed to be telling us about chairs and suchlike but are defective, unable to speak. (“We have no mouths and we must scream.”) Calling the senses dumb is as much a metaphor as is calling them deceptive. It is not that the senses have voices that work or fail to work; the senses have the same relationship to

voice that rocks do. None. Also, Austin's point about the senses is not tantamount to endorsing direct realism.

Why not? Because direct realism shares too much of the picture that sense-datum theories employ, too much of the picture of ourselves as "distant" from our senses. "Direct" for Austin makes sense only where "indirect" makes sense: there must be some specifiable sense for "indirectly" perceive to have in a case in order for "directly" to have a sense in that case. But what sense does it make, in the case we have described, to say that Bob sees the lawn chair directly? What could indirection come to in this case? He is not using a periscope. He does not see the shadow of the lawn chair on the grass while the lawn chair is obscured by a low wall (if this would even count as a case of indirection). As he stands there under the high noon sun, there is no sense in denying that Bob sees the chair indirectly—which is what saying that he sees it directly does. Direct realism is theoretically hollow: it makes sense only if sense-datum theories make enough sense to be negated. But there is one other, more specific thing that bugs Austin about direct realism. As Austin understands the matter, sense-datum theories and direct realism each prize a different side of one problematic distinction, the distinction between sense-data and material objects. The sense-datum theories claim we perceive sense-data; the direct realist claims we perceive material objects. But Austin mistrusts the distinction. The term "material object" gets its meaning simply from its contrast with "sense-datum." But from what does "sense-datum" get its meaning? It looks worrisomely like it gets its meaning only from—or at least largely from—its contrast with "material object." As Austin says, "what is spurious is not one term of the pair but the antithesis itself."¹³ But if the choice between sense-datum theories and direct realism is a choice between one of a pair of terms in a spurious antithesis or distinction, then the choice between the theories is spurious too.¹⁴

Still, you might say, "But wouldn't Austin agree that Bob sees his chair?" Yes, Austin would agree—given the circumstances of the case. "So doesn't that make him a direct realist?" No, it means that Austin agrees that Bob sees his chair. "But, then, doesn't Austin deny that Bob sees a sense-datum?" No, Austin does not deny that. He does not deny it any more than he denies that Bob (in this case) sees an *abracadabra*. "But chairs aren't sense-data!" But chairs aren't *abracadabra*? Earlier, I noted that nothing is alternative to nothing. It turns out that nothing is not alternative to *something*, either. A sense-datum is no alternative to a chair; and a chair is no member of the class of material objects (at least not as the sense-datum theorist or direct realist "employs" that term¹⁵).

Finis

So, let me pull Part Two together to finish. Austin recognizes that the contrast between the plain person and the philosopher is part of attempts to problematize the external world. The contrast is necessary in order to "discredit" the plain

person but also, more importantly, to provide a pedigree of intelligibility for the philosopher's metaphysical doubt. When that contrast is itself made problematic, the metaphysical doubt of the philosopher begins to look worrisomely unintelligible, too bizarre to be on a continuum with the (unsophisticated) doubt of the plain person. (Even a quick look at Descartes' *First Meditation* suffices to show how the contrast shapes his attempt to problematize the external world—as I have been suggesting above. And that is not an accident. Descartes squares up in front of his own goal) There is no reason to think that there is always room for metaphysical doubt in the cases where the plain person feels no doubt or even in the cases in which the plain person feel non-metaphysical doubt. To believe there is such room is to succumb to a *suggestio falsi*. There is no “distance” between any of us and our senses. Because there is no distance, there is no clear sense to be given to the idea that our senses “tell” us anything. Our senses are dumb. They neither speak nor fail to speak. And an item we might in particular cases see, like Bob's lawn chair, do not “tell” us anything either: seeing is not a receiving of information about anything,¹⁶ it is a determinate form of consciousness—in the case we have been considering, of consciousness of Bob's lawn chair.

Leaving these obscure comments in their *hic et nunc* inevitable obscurity, let me address briefly but more directly the question of Austin and the tradition. As I hope has become clear, my view is that S&S has been at best half-inherited in contemporary epistemology. To the extent that it exists for contemporary epistemology at all, it does so as a philosophical one-hit wonder: clever, snappy, danceable but ultimately just a thing of a particular moment. (Think Toni Basil's “Hey, Mickey!”) The most the book deserves is “placing”; we need not heed its place. Now, of course there have been philosophers who took the book seriously—who heeded its place. But they themselves are peculiar figures, somehow both important and marginal, voices from the outside strong enough to be heard but treated as disturbers of epistemology's workaday business (Rorty, Cavell, McDowell). In the interpretation of the tradition, Austin either is a direct realist or a contextualist (contesting the contextualist “placing” is work for another day, although it needs to be done). The tradition cannot help itself but to see Austin as part of it, in a card-carrying, participant way, or to see him as an irrelevance. But that tells us more about the depth of the conviction epistemologists have about the inevitability of their problems than it does about problems with Austin. No one wants to be told or even made to worry that their work was all for nothing, bustle—that they had spent the day on horseback but aboard a ship.

Notes

- 1 Dummett makes this remark in *Truth and Other Enigmas*.—My thanks to the members of my summer reading group on Austin, some of whom also provided specific

suggestions for or corrections to this essay: Micah Cobb, Howard Hewitt, Sydney Jolley, Chad Kidd, Shawn Standefer, Zach Wellman. My thanks also to Andy Bass for discussions and comments.

- 2 Husserl's concern with beginnings is of a different cast than Austin's, of course, since Husserl's beginnings, even though obsessively repeated, are beginnings that point toward distant endings, whereas Austin's beginnings are endings: in Austin's beginning is his end.
- 3 *S&S*, p. 142.
- 4 *S&S*, p. 2.
- 5 "There are no mere *façon de parler*, no mere manners of speaking." Thinking, writing and speaking are always and everywhere sensitive occupations. This does not mean that there are not metaphors—or a host of other rhetorical figures. It means that they too are not mere manners of speaking. (That does not render them literal, of course.)
- 6 Part of the difficulty here is the difficulty of explaining what philosophy is without assuming its problems, so that philosophy can be explained as the attempt to solve *these problems*. But if we cannot assume the problems, then that explanation of what philosophy is becomes itself problematic. (But then every explanation of what philosophy is is problematic, *isn't it? All philosophy is metaphilosophy*, right?)
- 7 *S&S*, pg. 1.
- 8 I will not take the time to survey instances, but a look at citations of Austin almost always has him grouped with, if not named among, direct realists. The reason why he is not named is often clear enough—the person citing him knows Austin denied being a direct realist. And yet, given the point about the dialectic here it is easy to see why Austin still gets grouped this way: *he has to have a theory*, but he repudiates sense-data, so he is a direct realist (even if he denies it and even if he is not specifically named as one). The trouble parallels the resistance to taking Wittgenstein at his word when he denies having a theory. To take this seriously for many would be tantamount to denying not only that Wittgenstein or Austin are philosophers but to denying that they even begin to exist as philosophers. A theory is the required invitation to the philosophy party.
- 9 Descartes uses both terms, or rather Latin equivalents.
- 10 *S&S*, p. 6.
- 11 *S&S*, pp. 7–14.
- 12 A particular person knows a particular thing at a particular place and time, and in a particular way. And that is about all, in general, we can say about knowing.
- 13 *S&S*, p. 4.
- 14 For a similar worry about these terms, see Dallas Willard's instructive "Perceptual Realism," p. 76.
- 15 See *S&S*, p. 14, n. 1 for more on Austin's worry about "material object." Austin does not absolutely reject the use of some catch-all term, but he does worry that such a term will suggest that all the cases caught are alike *full stop* or alike in certain ways, and thus result in prejudice toward or neglect of the facts.
- 16 For more on this difficult issue, see Dallas Willard's "A Crucial Error in Epistemology"—especially the final Leibnizian paragraph of p. 522. (I add here that I do not take Austin to endorse Willard's non-relationalist (ultimately Husserlian) positive account of perception. But I think Austin implicitly shares Willard's worries that the assumption of a relationalist account of perception counts as a clean-hands assumption.) See also Frank Ebersole's "And Then I See?" in *Things We Know*, pp. 72–88. Ebersole ends that paper with a wonderful denial—one that needs to be heard against the rest of the essay to be heard aright, but I will nonetheless mention it here: "There is *nothing* we do when we see." Ebersole is perhaps more Austinian than Austin himself. And of course Ebersole is not denying that when we see, *we see*. He is problematizing the idea that we can only understand seeing when we tell ourselves a story about goings-on that are "smaller" than the seeing.

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16

DAVIDSON'S INTERPRETATION OF QUINE'S RADICAL TRANSLATION, AND HOW IT HELPED MAKE ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY A TRADITION¹

Lee Braver

Donald Davidson's theory of radical interpretation is an apt topic for a book about the ways interpretations of analytic philosophers have shaped analytic philosophy as a tradition for three reasons. First, radical interpretation is an important adaptation, which is a kind of interpretation, of Quine's theory of radical translation, itself an important idea in the history of analytic philosophy. Second, philosophical investigations into the nature of interpretation make an appropriate addition to a collection of philosophical interpretations. As our patron saint Socrates might put it, in order to examine examples of interpretations, we must inquire into what interpretation is, and that is what these radical investigations do: they go to the root. Third, I will argue that the understanding of interpretation that informs Davidson's theory has significant implications for the way analytic philosophy conceives of itself, especially in relation to its contrasting tradition and potential conversation partner, continental philosophy. Thus, his interpretation of interpretation helps form analytic philosophy into a tradition, though I will qualify this. The subject of this paper, then, is distinctly, almost vertiginously reflective: it addresses how one philosopher interprets another philosopher's interpretation of interpretation, and how this relates to the way analytic philosophers interpret non-analytic philosophers and, by reflection, themselves.

First, I will briefly describe Quine's radical translation, and then at greater length how and why Davidson alters it for radical interpretation. Finally, I will address the implications of these changes for the history of dialogue between analytic and continental philosophers.

Quine's Radical Translation

Quine's theory of interpretation is an attempt to explain how we understand each other in the absence of magic; it is a resolutely Muggle or, to use the more

technical term, naturalistic theory. Given that we lack supernatural powers, he asks, how do we establish contact with one another and talk about things? Quine refuses to rely surreptitiously on miraculous access to others' thoughts, insisting on doing all work honestly, which means only using clues we actually have.

Conversations in a known language tempt us to cheat, so Quine selects as his paradigm a field linguist in the jungle translating an utterly alien language; her total ignorance of it is what makes the translation radical. The only resources this scenario allows her to translate the natives are prominent features of the environment and the natives' observable behavior, especially their assent and dissent from phrases whose hypothesized meaning she is testing. In Quine's example, a rabbit hops by and the native says "Gavagai." If the correlation continues, the linguist forms a tentative translation of "Gavagai" as "Lo, a rabbit," which she tests by querying, "Gavagai?" the next time a rabbit appears. Each native assent reinforces this rendition, which she can use to leverage further translations.

Quine draws broad conclusions from this scenario. Language is social and non-telepathic, so it can only be taught through what others can observe, leaving out private mental images, thoughts, etc., from the start.² A Muggle linguist can only be an empiricist. The field linguist's situation turns out to be the human condition because none of us has anything else to go on either. Meaning is just what we can mean and communicate to each other, and that is exhausted by the observable. This is highlighted by the jungle scenario, but it is actually the universal state of all communication. We are all radical translators for Quine all the time; such is the nature of interpretation in a radically disenchanted world.

Davidson's Radical Interpretation

Quine's thought made an enormous impact on Davidson: "it changed my life. What I had found so hard to take in was the idea that there could be no more to meaning than could be learned by being exposed to the linguistic behavior of speakers."³ Quine changed Davidson's thinking about language and meaning, and he never looked back. He did look forward, however, altering certain features of Quine's view to form his alternative theory.

First, Davidson disagrees about what our utterances link to. Quine's naturalism instructs us to listen to science, which says that we make contact with the world at our nerve endings. Sensory data produce what he variously calls surface irritations, proximal stimulations, or nerve triggerings in his modernized rendition of empiricism. These sensory impingements let us know that there is a world and supply the material with which we shape it.

But the whole point of Quine's approach, Davidson objects, is to place everything important into the socially observable realm. Only that which can be shared can play a constitutive role in meaning. Although Quine rejects secret mental meanings, nerve irritations are private to each individual (Davidson even calls them "Cartesian" (TLH 58)—a low blow in 20th-century epistemology). In

radical translation—which is, recall, the universal situation of all speakers—nerve stimulations should drop out as surely as mental images, for they are just as socially unobservable and unshared. In eradicating magic, Quine might have overcompensated with science.

Instead of nerve firings, Davidson argues, linguists connect utterances to the familiar objects populating our environment: rabbits, trees, people, etc. These are observable and shared and thus form the beachhead for all translation. Davidson expresses this change by saying that he moves from Quine's proximal stimulation to distal objects.⁴ A social phenomenon, language must principally concern shared entities like rabbits rather than neurons. Hence these are the things Quine should take as the referents of our words, by his own lights.

This brings us to Davidson's second disagreement. According to Quine's empiricism, the entirety of our knowledge of the world ultimately comes from the world's impingements on our senses,⁵ albeit often through circuitous routes and never in such a way that we could isolate the sensory evidence for individual claims. We come up with conceptual schemes to account for the scrubbings and scratchings of our nerves at varying levels of abstraction and sophistication by forming "posits" or hypothesized entities. We see a bright flash: we could posit a lightning bolt as the entity responsible for the sensation, as well as its source in either an angry god or the release of electric charge. We have indefinite leeway in coming up with posits that "fit [our] continuing sensory promptings" (Quine 1980, 46), guided by a few basic values: predictive power, simplicity, minimizing change, etc.

This schematic slack is what allows ontological relativity: societies, even individuals may use varying schemes for organizing sensory input, projecting different posits onto the blooming buzzing firings. All posits remain "underdetermined by experience" (1980, 45) in that we are free to conceive the data in many different ways, as long as we weave the rest of our web of beliefs to accommodate. A flash does not tell us what to make of it; it is up to us to select the scheme that lays an ontology over our sensations, whether of gods or electrons. This connects to radical translation when different, even incompatible structures of reference render equally smooth accounts of the natives' speech patterns (Quine calls this "inscrutability of reference"). We could switch out the ontology of rabbits that strikes us as natural for more exotic schemes, such as unseparated rabbit parts or instantiations of Rabbithood, and translation would continue undisturbed, all translational inputs and outputs remaining the same.

Davidson has several arguments against this view, but for the sake of space I will only discuss two. First, Quine's ontological relativism rests on a separation of sensory input and conceptual scheme, which Davidson calls the third and last dogma of empiricism (ITI 189), after Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." One of the guidelines for radical translators is the principle of charity: one ought not render speakers conspicuously bonkers, dissenting from facts we find plainly obvious or assenting to beliefs we find ridiculous. As a speaker approaches (an

unspecifiable) critical mass of silliness, a reasonable linguist will doubt her translation before his sanity. It's a question of odds: which is more likely to be odd—her translation choice, or an entire tribe of people? And which revision is simpler, preserving more at the cost of less alteration: changing a translation or two, or rethinking one's entire understanding of human nature? For Quine, however, the option to attribute bizarre beliefs is always open since others may be employing alternate conceptual schemes (PDD 76).

This is another situation where Davidson tries to out-Quine Quine, a common strategy among disciples. Quine shouldn't allow for multiple conceptual schemes because his own radical translation rules them out (ITI 228). What makes translating so challenging, Davidson explains, is that an utterance's meaning is the product of two variables—what one's words mean and what one believes—which, if allowed to vary freely, prevent understanding. Words can mean whatever we want them to, so battenning down that variable seems futile, and Quine's ontological relativity allows others' beliefs wild freedom, making the circle impregnable.⁶

However, Davidson thinks that if we super-charge the principle of charity then we can

solve the problem of the interdependence of belief and meaning by holding belief constant as far as possible while solving for meaning. This is accomplished by assigning truth conditions to alien sentences that make native speakers right when plausibly possible, according, of course, to our own view of what is right.⁷

We must relieve speakers of absurdly false beliefs by applying the principle of charity “across the board,”⁸ which means down to their ontology. If we know in advance that the natives basically believe as we do, then we can focus entirely on meaning, turning a two-factor impossibility into a one-factor task. Translational considerations thus eliminate the possibility of alternate conceptual schemes: the possibility of alternate conceptual schemes would prevent us from securing the most basic translations, those we would need to master their language enough to grasp a sophisticated possibility like their having an alternate conceptual scheme. Were someone to employ an alternate conceptual scheme, it would prevent comprehension, so that we could never know it for the very reason that we could not comprehend them.

But Davidson rejects the idea of a speaker with whom we could never speak, an unconvertible talker, a noumenal conversation partner, if you will. If someone cannot demonstrate their ability to speak and reason in such a way that we can in principle comprehend, we have no reason to attribute speech and rationality to them at all.⁹ This is a conceptual or transcendental point for him. The notion of a rational being endowed with language with whom we could not in principle speak is a conceptual absurdity, like a superhero who can turn completely invisible—as long as no one is looking at him. This is Davidson's Wittgensteinian inversion of

Descartes: you cannot be rational by yourself; reason exists, or at least only arises, in the in-between—in between people, and in between people and the world.¹⁰ Language, to be language, must be comprehensible; people must be able to speak with others to be people and rational. The way speaking and reasoning intertwine for Davidson betrays his origins as a classical Greek scholar, for both are senses of “*logos*.”

Davidson’s second argument against Quine’s ontological relativity starts from the claim that propositions get their identity partly from their position within networks of propositions. Connections to other beliefs partially give topics their content, so severing too many of these ties with flagrantly false or bizarre claims cuts a proposition adrift, letting its subject matter drain out. I can believe that the Earth is flat, but only if I also believe that the Earth is the big thing we’re standing on, made largely of dirt and rocks, supporting bodies of water, buildings, and many other things. If I believe that the Earth is a bunch of small, flat rectangles that people write on, then I’m not actually believing that the Earth is flat, but that pieces of paper are. Alternately, if I believe that the Earth is 600 yards long and resides in my bottom left-most incisor, or that the Earth is 600 yards long and that it isn’t, then I haven’t succeeded in believing anything at all. Like the law of gravity, the principle of charity enforces itself because the claims of those who stray too far from truth and reason do not become charmingly kooky, but empty or babbling nonsense.¹¹ We can disagree with others, of course, but only if we agree on what it is that we’re disagreeing about; otherwise, the subject matter diverges too much and we simply talk past each other. The principle of charity gives new meaning to the phrase, “we’ll have to agree to disagree.”

If our beliefs make up a vast fabric, in Quine’s image, then logical relations are for Davidson not just another swatch in it but the threads holding it all together. Quine (following out the dissolution of the analytic–synthetic distinction) opens all propositions to revision, including the laws of logic, provided we make sufficient correlative changes elsewhere among our views.¹² Although I haven’t come across Davidson putting it like this, he might ask Quine what governs these accommodations among the beliefs. Indeed, what demands alterations at all, and what determines which and how many changes are satisfactory? These epistemological ripples must be overseen by something like a transcendental set of rules, else the limit case of hanging on to a belief come what may by altering others would simply become anything goes, believe whatever you want without having to make any changes. The fact that this doesn’t hold, that extraordinary beliefs requires us to pay extraordinary epistemological costs, shows that loyalty to norms of rationality such as logic is the price we pay to be deemed sane, rational, capable of carrying on a conversation, and ultimately of speaking a language at all.

Davidson’s third alteration is to name his theory radical interpretation, partly because it has a heartier semantic component than Quine’s translation due to its use of Tarski’s Convention T. Ideally, we end up with sentences of the type, “‘Schnee ist weiss’ is true if and only if snow is white” for translating foreign

languages, and “‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white” for our own. These “T-sentences” spell out a sentence’s truth conditions, i.e. what must be the case for that sentence to be true. This is what one must understand in order to grasp that sentence, which Davidson considers a good approximation of the elusive notion of meaning.

Interpreting a Tradition

One concern that may arise for Davidson’s model of understanding is that it “sounds sweeping, even authoritarian” in his words (PR 195), since the radical interpreter judges interlocutors by her own beliefs and standards.¹³ Encounters with someone who doesn’t speak my language present me with a choice: he either conforms to my norms of rationality and basic views about the world or I must dismiss him as bereft of speech and reason itself. “All thinking creatures subscribe to *my* basic standards or norms of rationality”¹⁴ on pain of exile from the space of reason. Such charity hardly seems charitable.

Davidson rejects this characterization.¹⁵ Using the principle of charity in interpreting others is “unavoidable,” for interpretation means identifying the meaning of our interlocutors’ words and we simply have no other norms to do this but our own.¹⁶ This is what makes a common rationality an *a priori*, transcendental requirement rather than an empirical matter, a necessary presupposition of communication rather than something we might or might not discover. We must find others to be, on fundamental matters at least, in line with ourselves, i.e. rational, since, as we saw above, someone who diverged too far would no longer make enough sense to even make sensible nonsense. Even someone like Descartes’ madman who believed he was made of glass meets this standard of rationality on Davidson’s scheme. He has to. He must have mostly true beliefs about glass just to believe that he is made of it, and we can only uncover this surprising view through discussion with him, which must cohere with accepted beliefs about glass for us to figure out what he believes about it in the first place. Even if he *were* made of glass, we could not peer into his head to directly see his beliefs. “An agent cannot fail to comport most of the time with the basic norms of rationality, and it is this fact that makes irrationality possible” (PR 197). We might add that it also makes it impossible, for too much irrationality destroys the content of the supposed irrational beliefs, thus eliminating the alleged irrationality. As Derrida would say, the principle of charity is the condition of both the possibility and impossibility of irrationality.

The principle has a homogenizing effect. All creatures capable of thought and speech must think and speak in basically similar ways across all cultures and time periods. Differences have to be superficial if they are to be meaningful; they cannot differ too much if they are to differ at all. This homogeneity smooths out the rocky first steps of radical interpretation, justifying leaps of assumptions about word meanings across potential chasms of cultural differences or divergent ontological

schemes. “The radical interpreter ... can assume he and [his subject] share most basic concepts. Thus a first guess is apt to be right.”¹⁷ Indeed, given the strategy discussed above of holding beliefs constant while solving for meaning, if radical interpretation is to succeed, “the only possibility at the start is to assume general agreement on beliefs” (ITI 196). An unavoidable presumption cannot be considered presumptuous.

This gives rise to what we might call “Davidson’s fork”: interlocutors either have our basic ways of speaking and thinking or they have none.

If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviour of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything.¹⁸

Radical interpretation assimilates until it finds too much unassimilable strangeness, at which point it tips to the other extreme, ejecting the interlocutor from the space of reason entirely. Reason like me, or you’re not reasoning at all.

Davidson bases radical interpretation on Quine’s jungle thought experiment, and he too considers these conditions to characterize all communication (e.g. ITI 125). One question that arises in light of the topic of this anthology is how this view of communication applies to encounters between analytic philosophers and their dark other: continental philosophers. These two groups, after all, find themselves in something of the position of field linguists with regard to each other: they do not speak each other’s languages or inhabit the same professional world, and often cannot see what the other is referring to. Although Davidson generally focuses on face-to-face encounters, he is willing to apply radical interpretation to texts, writing that James Joyce “puts us in the situation of the jungle linguist” with regard to his novels (TLH 157) while making similar claims about Plato’s texts (see Braver 2011).

Whereas Davidson aims his theory at a very basic level of speech and rationality, I am here applying it to philosophical discourse between groups who must make considerable efforts to interpret each other. The history of these efforts reveals a version of Davidson’s fork frequently popping up, i.e. a willingness on the part of prominent analytic philosophers to revoke the continental’s license to philosophize, sometimes even to reason. Since she does not conform to the standards of analytic philosophy, because she does not speak or reason in the analytic way, employ standard analytic forms, or refer intelligibly to the prominent landmarks of the analytic intellectual landscape, she simply is not doing philosophy. Davidson says that neither continental philosophers¹⁹ nor pragmatists²⁰ employ arguments; he cannot recognize any in their writings because they do not use the kind of arguments that he and those he reads and talks with use. They have failed radical *philosophical* interpretation, and so cannot be considered rational at the professional level: they are not capable of having a philosophical conversation. At one point,

he restricts the very pursuit of truth to only analytic thinkers.²¹ This fork occurs at a higher level than Davidson's theory aims; I trust that continentals would still be granted the capacity to spot rabbits and pass the butter, but they are regularly denied the ability to think or speak philosophically by the best analytic philosophers, often in startlingly strong terms.

When Frege reviewed Husserl's *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, for example, he did not simply show where they disagreed and argue that Husserl was wrong, but "gauge[d] the devastation caused" by the "philosophical disease" contracted by the poor man (1972, 337). Frege later called the idea that someone could think according to a different logic "a hitherto unknown type of madness" (1964, 14). As with Davidson's rejection of Quine's ontological relativism, any alternate form of rationality collapses into irrationality. According to Russell's history of philosophy, Fichte's thought "seems almost to involve a kind of insanity" (1945, 718). Carnap's reading of Heidegger did not find incorrect views, but nonsense since for logical positivism, you either speak on terms they recognize or you are not speaking sense at all. This verdict is no hyperbole: "in saying that the so-called statements of metaphysics are *meaningless*, we intend this word in its strictest sense" (Ayer 1959, 61). Ayer said the same about Heidegger and Sartre, calling their statements "literally nonsensical" (Vrahimis 2013, 94).

Searle determined that "Derrida has a distressing penchant for saying things that are obviously false," noting the "breathtaking implausibility of Derrida's claim," "the deliberate obscurantism of the prose," and the way his claims "under analysis often turn out to be silly" (Searle 1977, 203; 1983). Quine, among others, signed a letter protesting Derrida's honorary degree from Cambridge on the grounds that Derrida was not a philosopher because his work did not conform to professional standards. Rather than reasoned arguments, it consisted in "attacks upon the values of reason, truth, and scholarship" and "defies comprehension" (Derrida 1995, 420–1).

When Davidson wrote on Gadamer, the great continental philosopher of interpretation, he took the other prong, assuming that Gadamer used terms the same way Davidson did, which led to his mistaking both where they agreed and where they disagreed.²² Now Davidson altered his principle of charity somewhat in the mid-1970s. Whereas originally interpreters had to aim at making their subjects agree with them, Davidson came to realize that this overlooks situations of understandable differences: for example, when the native can't see the rabbit, he will dissent from "Gavagai?" in its presence. The goal became understanding subjects rather than maximizing agreement. But little effort went into understanding what Gadamer actually thinks, and as far as I can tell none at all for figures like Heidegger, Lyotard, and Derrida, whom Davidson labels "sinister" (TLH 159), whose "shadows darken the philosophical landscape" of France (PDD 67). Radical philosophical interpretation allows only two possibilities: Gadamer passed the test and so must mean his words the same way as Davidson (even though he didn't), while the latter three failed and so can be condemned without engagement, which would be futile as they do not employ arguments.

Such criticisms, which have been quite common, go far beyond verdicts of being wrong or doing bad philosophy, saying instead that continentals are not doing philosophy at all, even not maintaining coherence. These thinkers are consistently accused—and this is just a brief survey of a few of the best known encounters²³—of doing something irrational, insane, intentionally incomprehensible, nonsensical, obviously false, silly, of disdaining arguments, abandoning or attacking reason. These strike me as quite like the baffled reactions of a field linguist whose subject maddeningly denies the obvious and asserts folly, until the linguist gives up in frustration and declares them to be not speaking sense or rational.

I repeat: I am moving radical interpretation a level or two of sophistication up from speaking and reasoning at all to speaking and reasoning philosophically; it is at the level of professional standards that the analytic “field linguist” finds the continental “native” to have failed, to be uninterpretable, and thus not a philosopher. If radical translation begins at home for Quine (in that we’re all doing it all the time), radical philosophical interpretation begins in the department, or at the APA. Davidson writes that, “to understand the speech of another, I must be able to think of the same things she does; I must share her world” (SIO 105), and this is just what the analytic and continental philosophers do not. They do not inhabit the same professional world, so they do not employ words with the same meanings, making conversation difficult. The curious thing is that this is precisely the kind of situation where a theory like radical interpretation should help us, and yet it tells us to dismiss those we cannot comprehend as incomprehensible full stop, which is what has happened time and again in analytic–continental encounters.

In a kind of tribal reasoning not confined to jungles, a loose aggregate becomes a coherent “we” when opposed to a “they.” Analytic philosophy can think of itself as a consistent tradition despite tremendous changes and diversity (see Preston 2007) by presenting itself as what is not the other. In this case, analytic philosophers are the ones who are sane, rational, capable of speaking clearly and presenting reasons, i.e. those who pass the test of radical philosophical interpretation, unlike continentals, i.e. the ones who fail. Of course, we can hardly lay this state of affairs at the feet of Davidson; for one thing, as we have seen, it has been going on long before him. Rather than creating this atmosphere, I would rather say that his theory of radical interpretation captures its mindset and lends it philosophical respectability. It legitimates the unwillingness to try to converse by declaring such conversation unfeasible and fruitless in advance. While some continental philosophers certainly dismiss or refuse to read analytic philosophy, I cannot think of a single instance of rejecting it *as* philosophy; standard criticisms are that it is dry, dull, overly technical, irrelevant to life, but not that it simply fails to qualify as philosophical or rational.

The change that Davidson made to Quine’s radical translation on the other hand underwrites such rejections. Quine’s allowance of alternate conceptual schemes gives considerable leeway in what views one can allow one’s interlocutor

without accusing her of irrationality; his principle of charity is more charitable (even if he signed the letter protesting Derrida's honorary degree). In deciding which ontology we should adopt, which also applies to what scheme we should use to translate others, Quine writes that "the obvious counsel is tolerance and an experimental spirit" (1980, 19). Such an attitude would greatly ease analytic-continental dialogue, encouraging patience with what initially strikes us as perverse, notions that contravene what we take to be basic and non-negotiable, for negotiating just these matters is how we evolve. This is hard, frustrating work, but it is what we expect from students in introductory classes every semester. Davidson's holism tells us that it takes time and attentive study to see how a thinker's words and ideas interrelate and collectively determine each other's meanings (e.g. SIO 152). His radical interpretation, however, pulls the other way, towards an assumption of homogeneous sense and hence either smooth comprehension or rejection.

Interestingly, another of Davidson's ideas gives us a helpful way to approach what continental philosophers are doing, namely, his counter-intuitive claim that "there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed" (TLH 107). What he means is that language is not rigidly governed by rules and conventions that dictate all linguistic moves. If it were, we would have far more trouble understanding deviations, mistakes, innovative or idiomatic phrases, etc. There is more flexibility in grammar and vocabulary than is dreamt of in philosophy, as shown by the way we immediately grasp unexpected combinations of words through what he calls "passing theories." These are on-the-fly, adaptive ideas of what a speaker might mean when she makes surprising, initially incomprehensible utterances. This reaches its zenith in writings like James Joyce's, a particular interest of Davidson's: "if the reader wanted to understand the text, he had actively to join Joyce in inventing a new language."²⁴

Continental philosophers apply something like Davidson's argument about language where he refuses to, arguing that there is no such thing as *a* reason or *the* philosophy, not if they are anything like what many philosophers have supposed.²⁵ We only have passing theories of these, continuously working out what they are in the doing of them, and they are continuously evolving. Saying that, e.g., Derrida is not a philosopher is absurd since, as he wrote in response to the Cambridge affair, "the question of knowing what can be called 'philosophy' has always been *the very question* of philosophy."²⁶ Like many great philosophers, Derrida's work enlarges and changes what we think of as philosophy, what philosophy can be, the way Joyce changed literature or Duchamp art, to use another of Davidson's examples (PDD 137). Foucault traces out the diverse ways various historical epochs reason, concluding that "for me, no given form of rationality is actually reason" (1988, 35). When Heidegger says that "thinking does not begin until we have come to know that the reason that has been extolled for centuries is the most stubborn adversary of thinking" (2002, 199), he is not practicing

misology and attacking reasoning. Instead, he is drawing a contrast between “thinking” and “reason” which resemble Davidson’s “passing theories” and “language,” respectively. In each pair, the former flexibly adapts to the subject matter at hand, somewhat like Aristotelian *phronesis*, whereas the latter obstinately insists on a previously set way of proceeding, filtering out what does not conform. As when reading Joyce, we work out what reason and philosophy are in the act of engaging in them. This is of course circular but, Heidegger argues, inescapably and virtuously so.

One of Davidson’s most frequently repeated arguments is that we have to use our own standards of rationality in judging others, even calling the claim “a tautology” (PR 69), as there simply is no other way to do it. But there is. Our standards can undergo a transformation in the encounter with the other, fundamentally altering our criteria of judgment, even those by which we judge whether that very transformation was rational or desirable. This is what Gadamer called a fusion of horizons, and Davidson praises such a process in Socrates’ modification of the Greek notion of justice.²⁷ This applies to Joyce since no one in, say, 1800 could have recognized *Ulysses* as a work of literature. Joyce not only had to write it; he also had to teach us how to read it, as Wordsworth says happens with every great writer.²⁸ Readers had to be open to a fundamentally new way of reading, something Derrida says of his own work (1995, 401); if they had insisted, as Davidson says is inescapable, on judging by their own pre-existing standards, then they could only have dismissed it as howling nonsense (Davidson cites Joyce saying something like this of his own work at TLH 148). “Rational”, in history, is often a retrospective qualification, as Hegel argues, especially at the most important junctures. The analytic philosopher who, practicing radical philosophical interpretation, imposes his own way of thinking on continental thinkers will be certainly flummoxed by what he finds, for he will find at best a terrible analytic philosopher, at worst an irrational, willfully perverse, and silly person who cannot philosophize and so cannot be considered a philosopher. That’s because she is being judged by a single standard, not just of good philosophy, but of Philosophy Itself. Applied to philosophy, ontological relativity says that Derrida cannot be read the way we read Descartes or Davidson, any more than Joyce should be read like Dickens. We have to learn from great philosophers how to read them, for truly charitable interpretation teaches us that there is no such thing as philosophy.²⁹

Notes

- 1 This paper employs the following abbreviations: ITI – *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2nd edition; PDD – *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*; PR – *Problems of Rationality*; SIO – *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*; TLH – *Truth, Language, and History*.
- 2 Quine 1969, 27, 81; 2013, xxix; here Quine is in agreement with Wittgenstein and Dewey.
- 3 PDD, 41, see also 80, 192, 596, 729; TLH 62.

- 4 ITI 136n. 16; TLH 47–8, 52–62, 80, 160; SIO 119–20, 130; PDD 84, 208–9; PR 142–3.
- 5 “Our surface irritations ... exhaust our clues to an external world” (Quine 2013, 20).
- 6 ITI 27, 144; PR 24.
- 7 ITI 137, see also 167; TLH 75.
- 8 ITI xix, 136n.16, 153, 228; SIO 148–9, PDD 81, 669, 730.
- 9 ITI 137, 185; PR 37, 51, 97, 196; SIO 40; TLH 170.
- 10 This idea gets more fully fleshed out in his later theory of triangulation; for more on this, see Braver 2011.
- 11 ITI 157, 168, 200; PR 15–16, 68–9, 189, 195–6, 204; SIO 89, 98–9, 124–5, 195; TLH 44, PDD 343, 480, 572.
- 12 Quine 1980, 42–3. Elsewhere (2013, 52–5; 1970, 80–94), Quine argues against the possibility of alternate logics, using either radical translation, the maxim of minimal change to our web of beliefs, or the early Wittgenstein view that logical connectives such as “and” or “or” mean nothing beyond their truth table function, so rendering them differently would give us a different word rather than a deviant logic.
- 13 Charles Taylor, for example, argues that Davidson’s principle of charity easily leads to ethnocentrism (2002, 291–2).
- 14 PR 195, see also PR 50, 98, 114–5, 156–7; PDD 125, 600; SIO 91, 150, 215; TLH 41, 319.
- 15 Although he does admit that his theory has difficulties here, noting that the changes he made to Quine’s ideas solve certain difficulties “but new problems then arise that cluster around the nature of error, for error is hard to identify and explain” (SIO 47, see also PDD 730, PR 51, 184, 190, 219).
- 16 PR 184, see also PR 36, 50, 169–70, 190; ITI 27, 62, 197; SCT 320, PDD 600.
- 17 PR 144, see also PR 138, but cf. TLH 275.
- 18 ITI 137, see also PR 98, 148, 157; TLH 45.
- 19 Davidson characterizes the analytic–continental divide as “between those who favored a historical approach to philosophy and those who knew some logic, and favored clarity and good arguments” (PDD 64–5).
- 20 He says of Mead and Dewey: “I have looked through these people for arguments, but I haven’t discovered any” (Borradori 1994, 49).
- 21 “I think of analytic philosophy as a method. The method is one which tries to state problems and arguments as clearly as possible and respects the pursuit of truth” (Kent and Davidson 1993, 19).
- 22 See Braver 2011 for a detailed analysis of Davidson’s reading of Gadamer.
- 23 A number of commentators have found the conviction of having found the one true way of philosophizing, with the concomitant expulsion of all who do not follow it, to be a persistent trait among analytic philosophers. Aaron Preston’s history of the tradition shows how “its dismissive attitude toward alternative philosophical approaches and those who practice them has proven to be one of [its] most enduring features” (2007, 13). He cites John Lachs’ well-known letter to the editor of the APA Newsletter concerning “the arrogance of declaring analysis the only proper method of thought” whereby “exclusion has become standard in the profession” (2004, 10, 6). In *What is Analytic Philosophy?*, Hans-Johann Glock writes that, “many analytic philosophers have lost either the ability or the inclination to distinguish between a refusal to share their views and methods on the one hand, and lack of philosophical talent on the other. There is a widespread presumption that those who do not conform to prevailing standards and preconceptions, who dissent or demand explanations, for example, are simply unprofessional” (2008, 249). The resemblance between these attitudes and that underlying Davidson’s fork is, I hope, apparent.
- 24 PDD 138, see also TLH 157.
- 25 Davidson did once say, “I’m against trying to draw lines somewhere and say, ‘This is philosophy and this isn’t’” (Kent and Davidson 1993, 19).

- 26 Derrida 1995, 411; see also 217, 376.
- 27 TLH 259; he also very briefly mentions these kinds of personal choices at PDD 423.
- 28 “If there be one conclusion more forcibly pressed upon us than another by the review which has been given of the fortunes and fate of poetical Works, it is this—that every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed: so has it been, so will it continue to be” (Wordsworth 1910, 331).
- 29 My thanks to Stephen Levine, Richard Manning, David Vessey, Dolores Morris, and Alex Levine for helpful comments on this paper.

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17

DUMMETT'S DIALECTICS¹

Anat Matar

We have passed this stage for good, hopefully, but one of the most salient features of analytic philosophy, during its first century, was its negligence of history. By this I do not mean that analytic philosophers disregarded important historical figures or that they believed the history of philosophy had no relevance to their own efforts, for that was not the case. The anti-historical approach was manifested rather in a total denial of a dialectical approach towards metaphysics. Both these terms, “dialectic” and “metaphysics,” when contemplated at all, were not thought of, by early analytic philosophers, in connection with the notion of time. Engaged in “analysis,” they conceived their dependence on the time-factor only in terms of their having better tools—in particular, a more sophisticated logical organon—than their predecessors did, in order to solve age-old philosophical problems.

This meta-philosophical approach had its own historical origins, of which the most notable is Kant. Even in his *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, the essay that expressed a kind of historical consciousness absent from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant kept philosophical analysis apart from the account of Nature’s purpose or even the goal of men. The distinction between contexts of discovery and contexts of justification, which developed into a central dogma in analytic philosophy, can be traced back to Kant’s separation lines.² It was explicitly adopted as a meta-philosophical cornerstone by the logical positivists, e.g. in Hans Reichenbach’s *Experience and Prediction: An Analysis of the Foundations and the Structure of Knowledge*.³ Yet the gist of this distinction was already embraced, implicitly, by Frege. Frege never considered historicism seriously, and his division between the two kinds of contexts had to do with his insistence on keeping anything “subjective” irrelevant to conceptual investigations. Here is how he articulates it in the Introduction to *Foundations of Arithmetic*: “Never let us

take a description of the origin of an idea for a definition, or an account of the mental and physical conditions on which we become conscious of a proposition for a proof of it.”⁴ Frege then goes on to spell out the distinctions between a priori and a posteriori, synthetic and analytic, according to his own advice:

When a proposition is called a posteriori or analytic in my sense, this is not a judgement about the conditions, psychological, physiological and physical, which have made it possible to form the content of the proposition in our consciousness; nor is it a judgement about the way in which some other man has come, perhaps erroneously, to believe it true; rather, it is a judgement about the ultimate ground upon which rests the justification for holding it to be true.⁵

Frege believed that despite himself, Kant developed a system steeped in psychologism and subjectivism, which could be overcome only by using Frege's own novel conceptual notation.⁶ However, despite these severe shortcomings, it is clear that Kant—of the first *Critique*—was the dominant figure addressed by Frege and thence by most analytic philosophers for over half a century. Kant was perceived as an ancestor whose work should be adopted as a springboard and his “mistakes” corrected through an acute attention to language and the new logic. It is almost trivial to mention Frege's *Foundations* and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* as examples, but Kant's inspiration is strongly felt also in the work of the logical positivists, on the one hand, and the so-called “ordinary language philosophers”, on the other. Paul Grice's “Logic and Conversation” (1957) and Strawson's *The Bounds of Sense* (1966) deserve particular mention in this context. Both try to preserve what they believe valuable in the *Critique of Pure Reason*—e.g. the rejection of scepticism, the centrality of a rational agent and the limits of reason—while “naturalizing” transcendental idealism and substituting its metaphysical notions with more mundane concepts. The fact that they share this attitude with their opponents within the analytic tradition, the logical positivists, is too often overlooked.

The picture is dramatically different in the case of Hegel. Despite the latter's revolutionary conception of logic, Frege never bothered to relate to it even in one sentence. This is not a matter of negligence or ignorance. As Stephen Käufer rightfully notes, “Frege and Hegel occupy opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum. Frege is the founding figure of analytic philosophy, Hegel the forebear of continental philosophy. It seems patent that whatever Hegel means by logic cannot be the same thing that Frege reforms.”⁷ Frege's disregard was replaced by Russell and Moore's overt hostility. Famously, at the beginning of their career, both philosophers were influenced by McTaggart and adopted his version of Hegelianism. Yet eventually they found it counter-intuitive and rebelled against it, opting instead for commonsense realism and logical atomism. A similar overt antagonism towards Hegelianism can be detected in Carnap. In “The Elimination of Metaphysics” (1932), Hegel is mentioned as a predecessor of Heidegger, in

promoting nonsensical pseudo-statements. In 1957, 25 years after its original publication, Carnap bothered to append to the reprint of his classic article a short addendum. His first remark explains that the term “metaphysics,” as used in the article, referred to “the field of alleged knowledge of the essence of things which transcends the realm of empirically founded, inductive science,” as exemplified in “systems like those of Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Bergson, Heidegger.”⁸ Kant’s absence from this list of enemies is as significant as Hegel’s presence in it. Later analytic philosophers continued to either ignore Hegel or explicitly denounce his kind of metaphysical thinking. Indeed, in recent years several interpretations have been offered, in which leading analytic philosophers—mainly those working in the 1950s—are analyzed vis-à-vis Hegel’s thought.⁹ But even if one may uncover some Hegelian traits buried in the analytic canon, I believe that no one seriously advances the claim that early analytic philosophers wished to integrate Absolute Idealism or some other version of a non-naturalized dialectical approach towards metaphysics into their own philosophical scene.



Michael Dummett’s first philosophical essays appeared in the mid-1950s and consisted mainly of comments on Frege, logic, and the surprising metaphysical topic of backwards causation. The latter was a result of a joint seminar on the philosophy of time Dummett gave in collaboration with his former tutor, Elizabeth Anscombe. In his *Intellectual Autobiography*, written for a volume of the *Library of Living Philosophers* series dedicated to his work, Dummett mentions three sources of influence which shaped his thought from the beginning: Frege, Wittgenstein, and intuitionistic logic. He was, he says, “bowled over by the *Grundlagen*,” believing—throughout his life—that “it was the most brilliant piece of philosophical writing of its length even penned,” for its “almost complete lucidity” and the “almost complete rigour of [Frege’s] arguments.”¹⁰ Frege supplied Dummett with the metaphysical framework that suited him. As we shall see in more detail below, this was manifested primarily in the “context principle,” which Dummett took to be the founding moment of analytic philosophy. Wittgenstein’s contribution to his philosophical formation was on a somewhat different level. According to Dummett’s own testimony, when he first encountered Wittgenstein’s writings (these were underground copies of the *Blue and Brown Books*), their impact on him was immense: “for about three months, everything I tried to write came out as a *pastiche* of Wittgenstein.” Compared with Wittgenstein, Frege lacked the “insight into views he rejected, and Wittgenstein’s sympathy for the confusions in our minds” (*ibid.*) As for intuitionistic logic, Dummett’s interest grew out of a more general interest in mathematical logic, but he “felt strongly drawn” to intuitionism in particular:

This may seem inconsistent with my devotion to Frege, who was a determined realist. It was not his realism that attracted me, however, for which, I

thought, he never really argued, but which he simply took for granted, but the clarity of his thought: much of his thinking was perfectly compatible with a constructive view of mathematics What was essential for [the meanings of mathematical statements], as conceived by intuitionists, was that they reflected only the *use* that we learn to make of mathematical statements, not a conception of their truth-value, determined by abstract reality whether apprehensible by us or not.¹¹

Intuitionism, then, provided Dummett the linkage between Frege and Wittgenstein. Within a logical framework, similar to that of Frege in its basic methodological approach, he could embed—using intuitionistic notions—Wittgenstein's emphasis on practice. The result of this triple influence is Dummett's famous suggestion to develop an anti-realist theory of meaning and to consider it seriously as a viable metaphysical alternative to the realist framework. This proposal was first articulated in 1959, in "Truth," an article which soon became classic. Without going into the details of this alternative metaphysics at the moment, it is important to take notice of Dummett's claim that some of the most fundamental maxims governing the analytic attitude towards the notion of meaning had been nothing but dogmas, taken for granted, rather than well thought-of and argued-for principles. When analytic philosophers think of meanings of statements in natural language, they tend to follow the way they conceive of formalized languages. Of formal systems it is usual to think in *extensionalist* terms, i.e. to conceive of mathematical notions and statements as interchangeable *salva veritate* if and only if they refer to the same objects (truth-values, in the case of statements). Dummett's criticism of this methodological principle is twofold: it concerns, first, natural language, but thereafter, formalized language—logic and mathematics—as well. Once extensionalism is eschewed in principle, it can be avoided and replaced in particular domains. What is needed, then, is an investigation into an alternative theory of meaning.

This is, indeed, the central challenge. Dummett argues that natural language essentially resists extensionalist reduction and that sense cannot be rendered by truth conditions, being much richer than what they capture. Yet he is not happy with concluding simply "that laying down the truth-conditions for a sentence is not sufficient to determine its sense, that something further will have to be stipulated as well,"¹² something like a description of our diverse procedures in using sentences, that would complement the truth-conditional foundation. Dummett's conclusion is much more drastic. Having discussed the insufficiency of the "redundancy theory"—the theory according to which asserting that a statement is true is equivalent to asserting the statement itself—he generalizes the upshot of his discussion as follows: "we must abandon the idea which we naturally have that the notions of truth and falsity play an essential rôle in any account either of the meaning of statements in general or of the meaning of a particular statement" (7).

The appeal to the notions of truth and falsity in order to understand the meaning of "meaning" leads us astray. This is because—as Wittgenstein would

say—there is a *picture* of language that holds us captive: “And we couldn’t get outside it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat it to us inexorably.”¹³ Explicitly acknowledging his debt to Wittgenstein on this point, Dummett maintains that this picture stems from a wonder at the power of language to refer to the world outside and at our ability to communicate, to share meanings. When this wonder is translated into metaphysical reflection, the picture that is almost forced upon us is of language as some kind of shared code, which connects the world outside us with a mental representation of it. Despite the fact that early analytic philosophers were aware of the problems of mentalism, they were—according to Dummett—still led, inadvertently, by this myth. It is only with the later Wittgenstein that a viable alternative picture was offered, one that is based upon seeing language as activity rather than representation, and explanations of the meaning of a statement as rendered by describing its use rather than stating the condition for it to be true. Wittgenstein asks us to overcome the traditional way in which we conceive of the essence of language by bringing “words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.”¹⁴ Dummett picks up the gist of this insight, but his interpretation of its upshot is woven into his proposed anti-realist metaphysics.

I suggest that the best way to conceive of Dummett’s anti-realism is as a sublation—*Aufhebung*—of Wittgenstein’s suggestion, aided by the metaphysical and methodological tools offered by Frege and Brouwer. As Dummett sees it, since Wittgenstein shuns metaphysical articulation, the alternative he proposes remains “no more than a picture.”¹⁵ What is needed in order to make it into a full-blown philosophical option is to interpret it in such a way that it may serve as a basis for a detailed account of how linguistic practice may be exhibited within a theory of meaning.

Wittgenstein, for his part, could not accept such an *Aufhebung*, of course. Indeed, the very notion of *Aufhebung* is foreign to his attitude towards the nature of philosophical investigations. Although he found Hegel’s dialectical method “sound,” Wittgenstein believed that his rejection of a truth-based conception of language entailed the rejection of any systematic and unifying philosophical theories such as Hegel’s as well. Once we decide that the right way to approach questions about meaning is by appealing to practice, use, and real life, unity must vanish and we necessarily remain with an irreducible variety of delicate philosophical descriptions, which Wittgenstein entitled “grammar.” “*Essence* is expressed in grammar,”¹⁶ and this means that essence is the complete opposite of what Hegel thought of it. As Wittgenstein told his friend Maurice Drury, “Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same ... whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different.”¹⁷

But for Dummett, this emphasis on the versatility of practice should not come at the expense of systematization. On the contrary. In order to dispense with the notion of truth in our explanation of meaning, he argues, it is not enough to turn

to a piecemeal description of uses. We need also to “reveal on what basis it is possible to explain in general what linguistic meaning is and how our understanding of sentences depends upon our understanding of the words composing them and of the constructions they employ.”¹⁸ Moreover, since for Wittgenstein, too, some of the sentences that we frequently say must be criticized, it is unclear what permits him to advance such criticism; the frequency of their use is certainly no such indicator.

We need, rather, to distinguish what is merely customarily said from what the principles governing our use of language and determinative of the meanings of our utterances require or entitle us to say. To draw such a distinction, it is not enough merely to confine oneself to describing what may be observed to happen, or of assembling reminders of what everyone knows, as Wittgenstein claimed that a philosopher should do: the distinction does not draw itself, but requires some theoretical apparatus. The very methodology that Wittgenstein employed rested on general ideas concerning meaning that could be vindicated only by an outline of the very thing that he repudiated, namely a systematic account of how a whole language functions; and so, to borrow a phrase of his, his entire philosophy hangs in the air.¹⁹

The way Dummett conceives of analytic philosophy is closely connected to his complex attitude towards Wittgenstein's heritage. Philosophy, as he sees it in general, aims at an account of the fundamental structure of the concepts by means of which we think about the world. What marks out *analytic* philosophers is that they hold the following additional beliefs: “first, that a philosophical account of thought can be attained through a philosophical account of language, and, secondly, that a comprehensive account can only be so attained.”²⁰ In other words, what characterizes analytic philosophers vis-à-vis those belonging to other schools or traditions is that the former adhere to Frege's context principle, i.e. to his famous determination—immediately following his anti-psychologist principle mentioned above—“never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition.”²¹ Among Frege's interpreters, there is, I believe, no dispute concerning the metaphysical significance of this principle and of its indispensability in the analysis of the concept “number.” There is also unanimity in regards its influence on the composition of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Undoubtedly, one of the most important points of the *Tractatus* is that metaphysics is reflected in the structure of language—no matter how one interprets the eventual fate of metaphysics in that book. Such a linkage between metaphysics and theory of meaning disappears from post-Tractarian analytic philosophy, but this, Dummett believes, is a sorry development that only yields a more deeply entrenched dogmatism, since metaphysics is embedded in philosophical accounts whether their proponents acknowledge it or not. “Metaphysics can be abolished only if philosophy is abolished,” he argues.²²

It is this insight that explains Dummett's insistence on the importance of constructing the two metaphysical alternatives—the realist and anti-realist theories of meaning. Throughout his writings, he expresses his belief that once the details of both “logics” are worked out in detail, the choice among them would force itself on us: one would be found coherent, the other—incoherent. This absolutist conviction, along with the adoption of a methodology that takes logic as the appropriate starting point for philosophy, bears a strong Hegelian trait, as Dummett himself acknowledges.²³ The resemblance is not superficial and is not a mere curiosity. In fact, it is an important factor in interpreting Dummett's unique position within the analytic tradition as well as his interpretative methodology. Both Dummett and Hegel believe that the fundamental structure of our thought is best represented by the most purely self-conscious discipline, logic. For Dummett, logic (or the theory of meaning—he uses the notions interchangeably in this context) is the basis of metaphysics; for Hegel the two realms coincide, since logic expresses “the essential reality of things.”²⁴ For both, their attitude towards logic and metaphysics entails the conviction that philosophical disputes can be settled in principle. Now, since there can be no hypotheses in philosophy, there are only two possible scenarios for a philosophical investigation. We begin by analyzing, articulating, and judging the initial metaphysical hypotheses. Once this is done, either one maintains, with Wittgenstein, that the procedure leads to the disappearance of the problem that had prompted the initial hypothesis in question; or, as both Hegel and Dummett believe, the result of the investigation is that some of the hypotheses are rejected and some are secured as absolute.

The very point of view, which originally is taken on its own evidence only, must in the course of the science be converted to a result—the ultimate result in which philosophy returns into itself and reaches the point with which it began. In this manner philosophy exhibits the appearance of a circle which closes with itself, and has no beginning in the same way as the other sciences have.²⁵

As we shall soon see, further important Hegelian principles shape Dummett's philosophy. Among them are those concerning time, history, and interpretation. However, despite this common ground, Dummett diverges from the Hegelian framework on several significant points. One of the most important of those concerns the status of his own philosophical results. While Hegel saw in his logic a proof that full self-consciousness has already been achieved by him, Dummett believes that this is true only of his—or indeed, Frege's—*methodology*. Since for Hegel content and form are essentially one, once the logical foundations are articulated, there can be no further fundamental metaphysical revelation or development. Dummett's version of this idea substitutes the actual achievement by a potential one. As he sees it, full self-consciousness has not yet been attained; we do not yet know how the general principles governing the formulation of our

meaning-theory would look like, and hence cannot yet fully articulate the absolute metaphysics. What we do seem to know, according to Dummett, is what should be done, in principle, in order to finally establish these hypotheses as results: constructing a viable theory of meaning, i.e. working our way into metaphysics "from the bottom up."

According to Dummett, Frege's biggest achievement, the one that made him the "grandfather" of analytic philosophy, was the articulation of this change of perspective. Despite the greatness of past philosophers, philosophy virtually remained "in its early stages" before Frege delineated "the proper object of philosophy."²⁶ This last statement looks *prima facie* almost bizarre. It loses its eccentricity only when we bear in mind the Hegelian strand of Dummett's thought. This is not a very difficult task; all we need to do is to read carefully the last two pages of *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, Dummett's first book, published in 1973. The long quote is indispensable.

In the early years of the present century, it would have been impossible to see Frege's significance in the way it has here been described, because the impact of the change of perspective had not yet been realized. Rather, it would have been natural to lay emphasis upon Frege's realism, seeing him as belonging to the group of realist philosophers that included Brentano and Meinong. His realism can now be recognised as signally more sophisticated than that of Meinong, and yet more than that of the early writings of Russell and G. E. Moore, who raised the flag of revolt against the Hegelian idealism then dominant in England. The overthrow of idealism, in all its forms, was probably a precondition of advance in philosophy. Frege persistently attacked psychologism, and more than once pointed out that it leads inevitably to idealism; but, with this exception, he seldom attacked idealism directly For Frege to have achieved the revolutionary change of perspective that has been described, however, it was not logically necessary for him to have been a realist; but it was probably historically necessary.²⁷

Dummett continues this historical analysis by recapitulating the kernel of a realist theory meaning (truth and falsity taken as the central notion, the law of excluded middle that reflects a saturated reality, meaning as dependent on truth-conditions). He juxtaposes it to an idealist theory, like that of the intuitionists (proof procedures as condoning meaning, rejection of the idea that a reality independent of us fixes determinate truth-values of sentences, dethroning the law of excluded middle, etc.). He subsequently acknowledges Frege's revolution for making it possible to formulate "the antithesis between realism and idealism" through his conception of a systematic theory of meaning; and he finally comes back to his dialectical narrative:

[I]n order to arrive at the conception of a systematic theory of meaning, it was necessary first to defeat psychologism, to expel psychology from logic

and the philosophy of language. Idealism is by its very nature more prone to slip into psychologism [I]n Frege's day the kind of idealism that was everywhere prevalent in the philosophical schools was infected with psychologism through and through: it was not until it had been decisively overthrown that it became possible to envisage a non-psychologistic version of idealism Hence it was almost certainly a historical necessity that the revolution which made the theory of meaning the foundation of philosophy should be accomplished by someone like Frege who had for idealism not an iota of sympathy.²⁸

Dummett's *Frege* encountered a mixed response. There was general agreement about the fact that the book not only brought Frege back into consideration but also drew unprecedented attention to the role of interpretation in analytic philosophy. In this respect, I believe it is correct to see it, from our own contemporary perspective, as a tradition-shaping masterpiece, and to regard Dummett as one of the first historians of analytic philosophy. However, while some readers lauded the book as a scrupulous, painstaking and faithful analysis of Frege's work, others thought it was both historically and analytically erroneous. I have no intention to go into a judgmental debate about this issue here. Rather, I would like to address Dummett's innovation within analytic philosophy as driven by his own attraction towards an anti-realist theory of meaning. In other words, I claim that far from neutrally advocating the construction of two alternative theories of meaning—realist and anti-realist—to be evaluated objectively on our way to absolute truth, Dummett's dialectical reading of Frege, especially in that first voluminous book, manifests his own commitment to idealism, despite his admonition to the contrary.

There can be no doubt that Dummett's endeavor in reading Frege turned around the issue that had concerned him since the beginning of his career: the question of realist and anti-realist metaphysics, articulated as theories of meaning, whose early formulation, from 1959, we saw above. This agenda shows itself in the unique manner Frege's views are assessed not merely vis-à-vis those of his own contemporaries, Russell and Wittgenstein, but also vis-à-vis Dummett's own contemporaries, especially Quine and Kripke. Dummett in effect implements in his reading the lesson he summarizes in the book's last page, just quoted. Whereas Frege could not conceive of his own historical position as a dialectical rung in a ladder leading towards establishing the absolutely correct theory of meaning, Dummett occupied a historical position that enabled him to do so. He can distinguish between what, in Frege's work, was logically necessary—the change of perspective brought about with the “linguistic turn”—and what was only historically, or dialectically, necessary: Frege's realism. Dummett is fully aware, then, of the time factor, the historical position which makes his interpretation possible.

Perhaps it was that very early seminar on time, which helped Dummett weave together the different threads of Frege, Wittgenstein, and Brouwer. It is clear, anyway, that Dummett was fascinated by the question of temporality throughout

his life and that his reflections about it were intimately linked to his philosophical methodology from the beginning. A very early expression of this interest is his analysis, in 1960, of McTaggart's famous proof of the unreality of time. Dummett concurs with McTaggart in acknowledging the indispensability of temporally token-reflexive expressions and the fact that what is in time cannot be fully described without such expressions. He agrees, also, that McTaggart succeeded in showing that these expressions exposed an inner tension in the notion of time. Yet at the point where McTaggart deduces that time is but an illusion, Dummett argues we actually face a choice. We may indeed continue with McTaggart and argue for the unreality of time, but we may insist, instead, that "time cannot be explained away or reduced to anything else," and thus give up the prejudice "that reality must be something of which there exists in principle a complete description."²⁹ Exactly as he did in "Truth," written a year earlier, Dummett confesses that he is strongly inclined towards such a realist conception himself, yet the implicit commonsense assumption that McTaggart blindly accepts must be explicitly articulated and assessed.

One of the best formulations of the distinction between the realist and anti-realist alternatives appeared a few years later, in "The Reality of the Past" (1969). There, Dummett pronounces clearly the linkage between these metaphysical pictures and a conception of time:

What the realist would like to do is to stand in thought outside the whole temporal process and describe the world from a point which has no temporal position at all, but surveys all temporal positions in a single glance: from this standpoint—the standpoint of the description which the realist wants to give—the different points of time have a relation of temporal precedence between themselves, but no temporal relation to the standpoint of the description—i.e., they are not being considered as past, as present or as future. The anti-realist takes more seriously the fact that we are immersed in time: being so immersed, we cannot frame any description of the world as it would appear to one who was not in time, but we can only describe it as it is, i.e., as it is now.³⁰

It is of utmost important, in reading Dummett, to remember that the idea that we are immersed in time does not remain confined to the boundaries of a metaphysical proposal. Rather, it crucially influences his standpoint as interpreter and historian of philosophy. Dummett's reading of Frege was sometimes depicted as anachronistic, for he attributes to Frege theoretical notions and beliefs of a kind that was articulated and developed only after Frege's death. The central thesis of realism, in the manner Dummett discusses it, could not be held by Frege, since it appeals to semantics, meta-language, and truth tables, i.e. to notions that had not yet been enunciated during Frege's lifetime. What entitles him to appeal to them in his interpretation, then? An easy answer would be to say that any

interpretation—more concretely, any interpretation of past philosophers—is subjective and can only be described “as it is now,” because of the changing perspective due to the time flow. Yet this cannot be Dummett’s exact answer, naturally. His belief in absolute truth cannot square with such a position. More concretely, it is clear that he holds his interpretation of Frege to be *correct*, in principle, if not in each and every detail. How, then, is it possible to cut through realism and subjectivism, given the indispensability of the time factor?

Dummett himself does not address this question directly. However, an answer that reflects his general position on time, historical interpretation, realism, and truth can be found in the writings of another Oxford philosopher, R. G. Collingwood.

Collingwood’s hostility towards realism is very well known; it is documented vividly in his *Autobiography* and he argues for it meticulously in several books, most notably in *The Idea of History* (1946). He adopted dialectical thinking and put emphasis on the temporality factor both as a philosopher and as a historian. In *The Idea of History*, Collingwood expressed views that would easily fall under Dummett’s characterization of anti-realism, including the centrality given to justification and to the fact that we are immersed in time. The realist, as depicted by Collingwood, “treats historical fact as one thing and the historian’s knowledge of it as another.”³¹ Realism, Collingwood maintains, is closely connected to the empiricist tradition, but it misses the important role of evidence for understanding history. It therefore also misses a fundamental conundrum regarding historical research. The historian’s picture

stands in a peculiar relation to something called evidence [I]n practice, what we mean by asking whether an historical statement is true is whether it can be justified by an appeal to the evidence: for a truth unable to be so justified is to the historian a thing of no interest.³²

However, the past is no longer with us and cannot be inspected as if it was present. “*Ex Hypothesi*, the historian is not an eyewitness of the facts he desires to know” (282). How is historical knowledge possible, then?

This puzzle gives rise to Collingwood’s famous notion of “re-enactment.” The appeal to reenactment aims at overcoming the dilemma between a naïve realist conception, which pays no attention to the time factor, and a position like that of Croce, for whom all history is contemporary history. The historian, says Collingwood, aims at discovering a thought that belongs to the past, and the only way open for him is to think it again for himself, to “re-enact the past in his own mind” (282). He is able to do so because of the special nature of his subject matter: thought. Thought is both context-dependent and sustainable across contexts. If I wish to rethink a thought of a past philosopher, I must be aware that I cannot expound in detail the context that endowed it with sense. However, I

revive this thought if I “follow it in my own mind by re-arguing it with and for myself” (301). In the past, this thought

existed in a certain context of discussion and theory; in my mind, because I do not know that context, it exists in a different one, namely that of the discussions arising out of modern [relevant topics]. Because it is a thought and not a mere feeling or sensation, it can exist in both these contexts without losing its identity, although without some appropriate context it could never exist.³³

Taking these leads back to our discussion of Dummett's anti-realism and his interpretation of Frege, two points are worth noting. First, Collingwood's notion of reenactment captures precisely the kind of interpretative mode Dummett adopts in his reading of Frege. Collingwood's dialectical solution succeeds in overcoming the pitfalls of realism and subjective idealism, without fully adopting Absolute Idealism either, i.e. without taking history and philosophy as *fait accompli*. It thus helps us understand the peculiarities of Dummett's interpretative strategy and grasp clearly its dialectical nature. Secondly, while Collingwood is conscious of the essential linkage between his philosophical and meta-philosophical positions and his reenactment solution to the question of historical knowledge,³⁴ Dummett rejects such a linkage. For him, as we have seen, Frege brought us to the moment in which we may articulate clearly the realist and anti-realist alternatives, and then realize which one is compelling and which must be dumped. What Dummett refuses to acknowledge is that his dialectical interpretation of Frege is intimately linked with a rejection of any position that doesn't take temporality seriously. Dummett is indeed right in arguing that we do not yet embrace a comprehensive theory of meaning and that the anti-realist metaphysical picture has not yet been fully articulated. Yet the philosophical proposal Dummett advances—both as a philosopher and as interpreter—is far from being neutral. An analytic philosopher who “would like to stand in thought outside the whole temporal process and describe the world from a point which has no temporal position at all, but surveys all temporal positions in a single glance” cannot accept Dummett's interpretation of Frege, and especially not the historical analysis it leans on. His idea of the linguistic turn is different from that of Dummett, and like Russell, Carnap, and Quine he is antagonistic towards a theory of meaning that appeals to what he sees as hazy intensionalist notions.³⁵

Dummett's refusal to acknowledge the necessary connexion between anti-realist metaphysics and his dialectical method in interpreting Frege reflects a deeper reservation regarding general philosophical pictures. Famously, he was involved politically, in word and deed, and when he was knighted it was “for services to philosophy and to racial justice.”³⁶ However, he rarely discussed the possible liaisons between his philosophy and his political beliefs. A connection can be detected here and there; for example, in his anti-realist attitude towards political

representation in a democracy. “How is the will of the people to be determined?” he asks, and answers by arguing that no such general will exists prior to and independently of voting procedures.³⁷

Frege: Philosophy of Language ends with Dummett’s explanation of Frege’s role in the dialectical procedure I have discussed throughout the present essay. The Preface of the book ends with a reflective note about Frege’s political views. Its tone, and its inclusion as a final personal note, require quoting it in the present context as well:

There is some irony for me in the fact that the man about whose philosophical views I devoted, over years, a great deal of time to thinking, was, at least at the end of his life, a virulent racist, specifically an anti-semiter. This fact is revealed by a fragment of a diary which survives among Frege’s Nachlass, but which was not published with the rest by Professor Hans Hermes in *Freges Nachgelassene Schriften* ... When I first read that diary, many years ago, I was deeply shocked, because I had revered Frege as an absolutely rational man, if, perhaps, not a very likable one. I regret that the editors of Frege’s Nachlass chose to suppress that particular item. From it I learnt something about human beings which I should be sorry not to know; perhaps something about Europe, also.³⁸

Notes

- 1 Research for this article was supported by the Israel Science Foundation, Grant no. 176/13.
- 2 Cf. Paul Hoyningen-Huene, “Context of Discovery and Context of Justification,” *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science*, 18 (1987), pp. 501–515.
- 3 Hans Reichenbach, *Experience and Prediction: An Analysis of the Foundations and the Structure of Knowledge*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1938), p. 6f. and *passim*.
- 4 Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, translated by J. L. Austin, fifth impression with corrections, Oxford: Blackwell (1980), p. vi.
- 5 *Ibid.* p. 3.
- 6 Cf. *ibid.*, fn. 1 and p. 37, fn. 1.
- 7 Stephen Käufer, “Hegel to Frege: Concepts and Conceptual Content in Nineteenth-Century Logic,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 22/3 (2005), p. 260.
- 8 Rudolf Carnap, “The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language,” translated by Arthur Pap and reprinted in A. J. Ayer (ed.), *Logical Positivism*, New York: Macmillan Publishing (1959). The addendum, “Remarks by the Author,” from 1957, appears on p. 80.
- 9 Salient examples are Peter Hylton’s reading of Quine, “Hegel and Analytic Philosophy,” in F. C. Beiser (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, Cambridge University Press (1993), pp. 445–485; and more recently, Miriam Wildenauer’s comparison of Hegel and Grice on the concept of “person,” in her “In the Tradition of Kantotle: Grice on Making of Oneself a Free Person,” *Cadernos UFS de Filosofia*, Ano 6, fasc. XII, vol. 8 (2010).
- 10 Michael Dummett, “Intellectual Autobiography,” in R. E. Auxier and L. E. Hahn (eds), *The Philosophy of Michael Dummett*, Chicago and LaSalle: Open Court (2007), pp. 9 and 10.
- 11 *Ibid.* p. 15.

- 12 Michael Dummett, "Truth," in his *Truth and Other Enigmas*, London: Duckworth (1978), p. 11.
- 13 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte, revised 4th edition, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell (2009), §115.
- 14 Ibid., §116.
- 15 Michael Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*, London: Duckworth (1991), p. 15.
- 16 *Philosophical Investigations*, § 371.
- 17 Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Vintage (1990), p. 536f.
- 18 *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*, p. 182.
- 19 Michael Dummett, "Language and Communication" (1989), reprinted in his *The Seas of Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1993), p. 183.
- 20 Michael Dummett, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*, London: Duckworth (1993), p. 4.
- 21 Frege, op. cit. p. x.
- 22 Michael Dummett, "The Metaphysics of Verificationism," in *The Philosophy of A. J. Ayer*, edited by Lewis E. Hahn, LaSalle, IL: Open Court (1992), p. 145. Dummett analyzes there the metaphysical realism that subtly guides the logical positivists. Another detailed analysis along these lines is his "Realism," *Synthese*, 52 (1982), pp. 55–112.
- 23 *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*, p. 2.
- 24 G. W. F. Hegel, *Logic* (1830), translated by W. Wallace, 3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1975), p. 36.
- 25 Ibid., p. 22f.
- 26 Michael Dummett, "Can Analytic Philosophy be Systematic and Ought it to Be?," *Truth and Other Enigmas*, p. 458.
- 27 Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, London: Duckworth (1973), p. 683.
- 28 Ibid. p. 684.
- 29 Michael Dummett, "A Defence of McTaggart's Proof of the Unreality of Time," *Truth and Other Enigmas*, p. 356.
- 30 Michael Dummett, "The Reality of the Past," *Truth and Other Enigmas*, p. 369.
- 31 R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1946), p. 181.
- 32 Ibid. p. 246.
- 33 Ibid. p. 301.
- 34 That this is so can be seen when we put at the background of *The Idea of History* (1946) Collingwood's earlier book, *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (1933), where the dialectical approach is discussed thoroughly.
- 35 In his valedictory lecture, reprinted as "Realism and Anti-Realism" in *The Seas of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), Dummett insists that all along he has been developing a research program, rather than promoting a philosophical thesis of great generality.
- 36 Cf. Dan Isaacson's obituary: "Professor Sir Michael Dummett: Philosopher and Anti-Racism Campaigner," *The Independent*, 24 January, 2012.
- 37 Cf. Michael Dummett, *On Immigration and Refugees*, London: Routledge (2001), p. 12.
- 38 *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, p. xii.

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18

ON THE TRADITIONALIST CONJECTURE

Sandra Lapointe

Methodological discussions in the history of philosophy are scarce.¹ What makes for an “adequate” narrative? On what basis should we make decisions concerning periodization? How much importance should reconstructions grant to intellectual, cultural, political, and/or sociological contexts, if any? One’s answers to these and other connected questions—when answers are indeed to be found—are rarely explicit and the implicit views that can be gleaned in the historical-philosophical literature often conflict. While methodological disagreement is not undesirable (more on this below), just like any other kind of philosophical disagreement, it should be reasonable. This requires at the very least that methodological assumptions and commitments be made explicit and be apt for discussion. In what follows, my aim is to go some way toward such a discussion. In particular, I examine one assumption that seems to be pervasive in the history of analytical philosophy—what I will call the “traditionalist conjecture”—and explain why it needs to be reconsidered.

Philosophical Fruitfulness, Good Questions, and Satisfactory Answers

Philosophical history, that is, the philosophical study of past philosophies is distinct from other similar types of endeavors such as sociology of knowledge, intellectual history, and history of science. The boundaries between these are in practice not always hermetic, and this is as it should be: the value of an approach to philosophical history need not—at least need not *solely*—reside in the distinctiveness or purity of the methodological principles on which it rests but on their appropriateness. Because it should serve *philosophical* historians, the appropriateness of a good approach in the history of philosophy rests at least in part in its capacity

to foster philosophical fruitfulness. Used as a partial criterion, philosophical fruitfulness is consistent with broad methodological liberalism and tolerance and—more importantly—with genuine methodological pluralism. At the very least, since there seems to be no clear way of predicting very precisely and in general which historical approach is likely to have the most benefits when it comes to generating new, fertile ways to consider philosophical issues it seems indicated that our conception of what counts as admissible frameworks and interpretive principles be broad-minded.

Whether or not it is the only purpose of philosophical history, the requirement that philosophical history be philosophically fruitful, while it is permissive, does not amount to a license to anarchy. A reconstruction may or may not be fruitful. Independently of this, the approach on the basis of which the historian proceeds in her reconstruction may or may not be adequate. In the history of philosophy not all approaches are equally adequate. Whether the specific approach on the basis of which a given reconstruction proceeds is adequate is a function of its capacity to settle the questions that guide the reconstruction or narrative. A reconstruction or narrative is always, implicitly or explicitly, guided by a set of questions. Assuming that we have good (or good enough) reasons to pursue a set of questions, the adequacy of one's approach to philosophical history, in a given instance, largely depends on whether it makes available the kind of data that will yield satisfactory answers. Whether or not a given question is worth pursuing in the first place assuredly depends on a number of considerations. But ultimately, the value of an approach does not reside—or does not primarily reside—in the *absolute* value of the questions that guide the reconstruction, for there is no such thing.² A good approach is one that has the resources—appropriate principles for data selection and interpretation—to answer the set of questions guiding the reconstruction, whatever they are, in a satisfactory manner. Whether a given answer is “satisfactory” may not be immediately obvious. But it is not something that is arbitrary: with some effort and dedication, it is reasonable to assume that it may be settled in the context of a reasonable debate, as opposed to, say, by brute force.

There is no obvious reason to assume that the history of analytical philosophy is (or ought to be) conducted on the basis of methods and approaches different from those that prevail in the study of other philosophical periods. In practice, however, the presumption seems to be, at times, that the history of analytical philosophy is in fact distinctive and that this warrants us to approach it differently. One may argue that the history of analytical philosophy needs a distinctive approach on the grounds that historians of analytical philosophy often themselves identify as analytical philosophers. The equivalent obviously does not hold in the history of, for example, ancient, medieval, and modern philosophy. The argument may be based on the idea that chronological proximity between the historian of analytical philosophy and her object of interest makes it hard to maintain sufficient critical distance. She may have a personal history—for example, she was their

student or intellectual rival—with one or more past philosophers. In all these cases, the historians could be faced with additional hermeneutic hurdles and/or advantages. She may, for instance, believe she shares philosophical commitments with the author whose work she studies that she seeks to vindicate, and use them for the purpose, or she may clandestinely project her own views on the figures with whom she associates—whatever the basis for this association. Lack of critical and temporal distance often impedes objectivity—but they may in turn have epistemic benefits. Hermeneutic hurdles or benefits of this kind may indeed be greater in the history of analytical philosophy than they are for other historical periods. But additional hermeneutic hurdles only call for the necessity to exercise greater hermeneutic scruples, not for different approaches and methods.

In my view, broadly speaking, the success of an approach in the history of analytical philosophy is to be measured by its aptness to settle a set of questions. One such question is:

(AP) How has philosophy progressively specialised and/or diversified in the course of the last century and beyond to constitute itself into what we call “analytical philosophy” today?

Providing an answer to (AP) may not be the goal of all historians of analytical philosophy. There is a number of endeavors—for example, rational reconstruction, contextualisation, thematic investigations, doctrinal history—in which historians may engage that seek to answer different questions. But some and even many of us do have views on (AP). Many recent attempts to answer (AP)—some of them my own—however rest on assumptions which are epitomised in what I call the “traditionalist conjecture.” In what follows, I argue that the traditionalist conjecture short-circuits attempts to account for the diversity and richness of analytical philosophy in a suitably inclusive way. This, in my opinion, is the main reason why it should be discarded.

Reconstruction and Tradition

The task of historians of analytical philosophy is often described, broadly, as consisting in *reconstructing* one or more aspects of the analytical *tradition*. The notions of “reconstruction” and “tradition” are understood in a more or less intuitive sense. If we follow Beaney (1996, 3) a good “reconstruction” is meant to be the product of a dialectic that requires historians to use available philosophical and historical data (including recourse to sociological, cultural, and intellectual context) to (a) attempt to see philosophical theories and the problems they are supposed to solve as they were perceived by their authors, taking into consideration the relevant aspects of their social, cultural, and intellectual environment and (b) present and assess the thought of past philosophers as coherently as

is possible from a contemporary standpoint. While conceptions of the exact form of the dialectic between (a) and (b) may vary—what this dynamic ought to be would depend, in my view, on the nature of the specific questions the historian sets out to answer³—these general methodological guidelines are rarely considered to be problematic. In any case, they are not different from what seems to define the approach in other branches of philosophical history.⁴

Likewise, recourse to the notion of a philosophical “tradition,” while it raises a number of important methodological questions—for example, how do we individuate traditions? How does a tradition differ from a “school” or a “movement?—, is not fatally problematic *per se*. Historical narratives in philosophy and elsewhere frequently resort, at one point or another, to the notions of tradition, school, or movement. Historians of philosophy may fittingly resort to the notion of a tradition in order to portray more expediently a given theoretical context or emphasise the bearing of a given theory, author, or corpus on a philosopher or another such group. It is generally assumed that many such movements, schools, and traditions coexist at any given time. Their existence may be continuous or intermittent. They may gain and lose members over time without ceasing to exist. While identifying an author as the member or the adversary of a tradition, school, or movement will exhaust neither the complexity of the nexus of circumstances that converge in her thought, nor the intricacy of the socio-intellectual context in which her work was produced, it will usually help situate this author within the development of the discipline.

Narratives, Periodization, and Relevance

In philosophical history, reconstructions may have different levels of granularity. They may focus on the theories of single individual at a given time or the development of a school over half a century.⁵ While not every reconstruction takes the form of a *narrative*—one may for instance merely be interested in reconstructing, assessing, or comparing past accounts of a particular philosophical problem—narratives are nonetheless pervasive in the history of philosophy. In particular, an answer to (AP) will take the form of a narrative.

Narratives have boundaries and part of what makes for narrative unity is the fact that we have *reasons* to think of these boundaries as meaningful. To the extent that this is true, narratives are rationally constrained: at the very least the boundaries of a narrative should not appear to be arbitrary and, in philosophy, they typically are not.⁶ This may not always be clear. Narrative boundaries may coincide with more or less contingent events, e.g. the publication of a text or a scientific discovery and could, in many if not most cases, be adjusted. But assuming that at least part of the narrative is devoted to explaining why the text in question was, say, “seminal” or how the discovery “revolutionary,” these boundaries, while not absolute, are nonetheless reasoned and subservient to a certain purpose.

It seems reasonable to assume that when we set out to write the history of a tradition (or of an aspect thereof) the set of principles used to establish the boundaries of the narrative should coincide with the reasons we have to think of that tradition as unitary. It also seems reasonable to assume that whenever narrative boundaries are set, the following should also be determined: (i) which exact *period* (defined on the basis of a combination of chronological, geographical, linguistic, intellectual, and cultural determinants) the narrative is to cover and (ii) which figures are *relevant* to the story. That narrative boundaries, periodization, and relevance are connected is not insignificant. In the history of analytical philosophy, and especially when it comes to answering (AP), the assumption seems to be that our individual efforts—our partial reconstructions—should converge and feed into an overarching historical narrative that shapes what we take to be the story of the development of the “analytical tradition.” This assumption however turns out to be considerably problematic. Incidentally, the clearest indicator of the problem is precisely the radical lack of consensus, among historians of analytical philosophy, on questions concerning *periodization* and *relevance*.

Whether or not they always stand in the foreground, in the history of analytical philosophy, questions concerning periodization and relevance are anything but settled. When does the analytical tradition start? Who are the main protagonists? Is the analytical tradition (mainly) Anglo-American? Was it not rather at least originally Austro-German? Should Frege be included in this tradition? Should the members of the Brentano School? And what of the Polish logicians of Lvov and Warsaw? Over the course of the last three decades, attempts to come to terms with what the analytical tradition may have been and possibly still is have multiplied, often producing thought-provoking alternatives to “orthodox” narratives according to which we ought to situate the origins of the analytical tradition in the works of Russell (and/or Moore and/or Wittgenstein).

By shifting the focus of attention, these alternative narratives considerably enrich our understanding of the complexity and the multifaceted character of the recent philosophical past. They throw into light unexpected nexus of influences,⁷ draw attention to a number of authors who had heretofore been neglected—Bernard Bolzano being perhaps the most outstanding example of this⁸—and open up new avenues for scholarship. But by the same token, the coexistence of competing histories exacerbates the metahistorical quandary.⁹ Historians of analytical philosophy’s attempts to come to terms with questions concerning periodization and relevance remain inconclusive and generate broad and often vehement disagreements.

On the whole, in the history of analytical philosophy, the relative weight of questions concerning periodization and relevance has been disproportionate; and this is symptomatic of a malaise. Questions concerning periodization and relevance are not usually preponderant in the history of philosophy at large and disagreement is typically, if not marginal, at least principled. Consider, for the purpose of illustration, the history of medieval philosophy—but the point can easily be

generalised. When it comes to defining the scope of their investigation, medievalists' working principle is comparatively straightforward. At least as far as the Latin Middle Ages are concerned, it is generally agreed that medieval philosophy begins when thinkers "first started to measure their philosophical speculations against the requirements of Christian doctrine and as ending when this was no longer the predominant practice."¹⁰ To the extent that specialists assume that there is something distinctive about the way in which Christianity shaped the development of philosophy in Latin after the fall of the Roman Empire, the boundaries of what we take to be the Latin Middle Ages are not arbitrary. But even if they were, what's interesting is precisely the fact that questions concerning periodization and relevance in the history of medieval philosophy do not have much "existential" bearing: they don't affect the historian's self-conception as a philosopher. Whether the principle on the basis of which the scope of the investigation is determined is the object of broad consensus or that of genuine indifference, disagreement concerning periodization, if it arises, is typically dispassionate and reasonable: it can ultimately be imputed to recognizably epistemic factors. I mention and illustrate three that seems of foremost importance:

1. *Underdetermination.* In the history of medieval philosophy, disagreement may be the consequence of the fact that (inexorably incomplete, deficient) philosophico-historical data is compatible with reaching different equally well-supported conclusions as to, for example, who effectively were the first to use Christian doctrines as the yardstick of philosophy.
2. *Vagueness.* It may be that the descriptors used to fix the boundaries of the narrative are subject to vagueness. For example, the same historical data could lead to different interpretations of who counts as having first used "Christian doctrines" as a "yardstick" of "philosophy."
3. *Adjustments.* Periodization can always be adjusted. For instance, additional linguistic, geographical, and cultural considerations incited medievalists to both expand and further subdivide the Middle Ages, and identify different medieval traditions. There are, in addition to the Latin medieval tradition, Greek, Jewish, and Arabic traditions that are connected in various ways. The conventional wisdom here is to expect that the processes through which theoretical adjustments of this sort generally impose themselves through time will be subject to sociological and psychological variables. In addition, the new, adjusted view may itself be underdetermined or vague. As a result, it will take time for a new paradigm to establish itself and in the intermediary period disagreement is likely to prevail.

Although they may not exhaust all the causes for disagreement on periodization, 1–3 are likely to account for most. They can, in any case, be generalised and be used to account for disagreement on periodization virtually everywhere else—except when it comes to (AP).

Interestingly, and this is another point, in most subfields of the history of philosophy, agreement on periodization typically settles questions of relevance. This is to be expected. The opposite would indicate that the principles used to determine the (chronological, geographical, linguistic, intellectual, and/or cultural) boundaries of the period in question contain concealed parameters. Once the chronological, intellectual, linguistic, and/or geographical boundaries of the period under scrutiny have been agreed on, there seems to be no obvious justification for claiming that a given figure falling within these boundaries is not also relevant, in one way or another, to the story.

In the history of analytical philosophy, however, periodization and relevance appear to entertain a much roomier relationship. At least in the face of it, none of the (often merely tacit) underlying conceptions of periodization seem to settle debate concerning relevance. Conceptions of periodization—even when they seem to include all relevant chronological, geographical, intellectual, cultural, and/or linguistic determinant—are invariably too broad or too narrow to generate consensus and, as a result, questions concerning the relevance of individual figures or movements to the analytical tradition unavoidably arise. Assuredly, “orthodox” narratives according to which analytical philosophy was born in the groundbreaking works of a handful of Cantabrigian philosophers in the first few decades of the 20th century offers an implausibly simplistic—and arguably mistaken—picture of the roots of what we call analytical philosophy today (I develop this point below). On the other hand, attempts to broaden the scope of the narrative haven’t been successful either. Even merely stretching the origins to include, for instance, Frege’s seminal contribution to logic and the philosophy of language results in all sorts of arbitrariness. At the very least, it seems incongruous to include Gottlob Frege, an influential German-speaking mathematician and logician of the second half of the 19th century, among analytical philosophers while, at the same time, excluding Edmund Husserl, another influential German-speaking mathematician and logician¹¹ of the same period—and one with whom Frege had direct contact!—in the same group.

It is natural to assume that part of what makes the history of analytical philosophy singular in this respect is the fact that what “analytical philosophy” picks out—presumably the set of theoretical and/or methodological commitments shared by analytical philosophers, assuming that there is such a thing—is itself eminently elusive. In recent years, attempts to define analytical philosophy—often with reference to its putative genealogy, which seems to run us into a circle—have multiplied. Is it to be defined at least in part by a common set of *methods* (Beaney 2016)? A collection of *inter-related texts* (Crane 2012)? Is it merely a *style* (Leiter 2004)? Should it rather be defined in terms of *family resemblances* (Glock 2008)? Is it in fact merely an illusion (Preston 2007)? One might reasonably assume that a good definition of what analytical philosophy is would automatically provide historians with clear criteria for the purpose of defining the boundaries of their narratives. This strategy, as I will argue, is, however, bound to fail.

Traditionalist Narratives

I started the essay with the claim that the task of historians of analytical philosophy is usually conceived to consist in reconstructing some aspect of the analytical *tradition*. While recourse to the notion of a “tradition” is not in principle problematic, in the history of analytical philosophy it is generally somewhat idiosyncratic. When attempting to answer (AP) the assumption seems to be that individual efforts of historians should converge into one overarching narrative whose object is this putative analytical tradition. In this respect, accounts of the development of analytical philosophy seem to be premised on the more or less explicit conjecture that analytical philosophy *is itself one*—unique and distinctive—tradition. Let’s call this the “traditionalist conjecture.”

Whether or not they have clear, substantive views on periodization and relevance, most historians of analytical philosophy seem to be tacitly or explicitly committed to the traditionalist conjecture—and those who aren’t seem to remain agnostic, rarely objecting to it. But if the traditionalist conjecture is correct, the story must be that of a cohesive group of philosophers whose existence, as a group, is dependent on a kind of unity that is constituted, in addition to some chronological, geographical, cultural, linguistic, and/or intellectual factors, at least in part by some minimal agreement on doctrinal matters: the analytical tradition is presumably characterized by a set of consistent intellectual, theoretical, and/or methodological commitments that can be traced along textual chains.¹² “Presumably” here is not meant to indicate wholesale scepticism, and I will not be suggesting that there is no analytic tradition. My position, to be clear, is that not *one*, but *many* traditions, schools, and movements concurred to shape what analytical philosophy is understood to be today and that consolidation is not a philosophically fruitful way to handle the kind of diversity this manifold entails when answering (AP).

What’s especially suspicious about the traditionalist conjecture is the fact that it is de facto palpably whiggish. Historians of analytical philosophy—presumably because they are themselves engaged in practicing some aspect of “analytical philosophy”—, are generally assumed to *stand in fiduciary relations* and *share intellectual commitments* with analytical philosophers of the past. As Scott Soames (2014, xi) puts it, his own approach yields a narrative in which the protagonists are “those who did so much to make us who we are, [and] are our contemporaries in what amounts to a common quest.” Soames’s point is neither merely rhetorical nor isolated. Both ideas—the presumptive *uniqueness* and the *teleological* nature of the analytical tradition—while they are not always articulated explicitly are nonetheless pervasive in the history of analytical philosophy. Narratives are thus generally premised on the idea that the authors historians of analytical philosophy study (i) form a unique tradition (or school or movement) that is (ii) defined by philosophical commitments (be they methodological or theoretical or both) that (iii) reflect one’s own philosophical commitments.¹³ (i)–(iii) are assumptions that demarcate what I will call the “traditionalist approach.”

Although this is a merely contingent fact, the traditionalist approach is unique to the history of *analytical* philosophy. When philosophical historians elsewhere refer to “traditions”—say the “empiricist tradition” or the “medieval syllogistic tradition”—the term “tradition” is generally used to pick out a comparatively leaner network of influences, and philosophical diversity is not usually downplayed. Elsewhere, the history of philosophy is generally understood to be the locus of a possible and often actual plurality of traditions, schools, and movements. By contrast, what is supposed to count as belonging to the unique “analytical tradition” is unmanageably rich and diverse: this putatively *unique* and *exclusive* tradition includes much of what has been accomplished in philosophy over the last century and beyond, in subdisciplines that range from the philosophy of mind, language, and logic to metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

More importantly perhaps, whether the historian shares (some of her) theoretical or methodological commitments with the authors she studies is not in principle part of the considerations that are relevant to determining the scope of her investigation. This being the case, one should wonder about at least two things. First, since there is no *a priori* reason why historians of analytical philosophy should be banking on a special historical approach (or a special set of assumptions), one may want to determine, on the one hand, *what* historians of analytical philosophy are trying to achieve with (i)–(iii) and, on the other hand, *how* what historians of analytical philosophy are trying to do with (i)–(iii) differs from what historians of ancient, medieval, modern, German (etc.) philosophy are trying to achieve without it. Second, one would need to explain what are the philosophical benefits of a traditionalist approach.

For there are many problems with (i)–(iii). For one, (ii) is notoriously underdetermined. Preston (2007) and Glock (2008) amply and, in my opinion satisfactorily, argue that previous attempts to pin down what philosophical commitments define the analytical tradition is either too narrow or watered down. In the benefit of time, I will not review their and other objections. Instead, I want to focus on (i) and (iii), which I take to be more fundamentally misguided. (i) is inadequate because the richness and diversity that led, over the course of the last century and beyond, to the emergence of the concerns and theories that constitute contemporary analytical philosophy, cannot be packed into a *unique* tradition. (iii), on its part, makes it virtually impossible for the traditionalist historian to avoid falling prey to certain kinds of biases that are typically detrimental to the practice of philosophical historians and indeed philosophers at large. Both considerations should, at the very least, incite us to try to gain a better understanding of the historiographical and methodological assumptions on which traditionalist narratives in the history of analytical philosophy rest. They should ideally prompt the reader to look for a healthier relationship to philosophical history.

The Problem with (iii)

When it comes to portraying the development of the discipline (that is, the network of influences that explain how the field has evolved over a given period),

historians proceed on the basis of a formidably wide range of philosophico-historical data—for example, textual evidence and other kinds of documents pertaining to the intellectual, theoretical, linguistic, cultural, and sociological contexts. In addition to being liable to accidental cognitive failures, historical investigations are notoriously undermined by a number of “hermeneutic challenges.” There is little literature on the cognitive underpinnings of these hermeneutic challenges, but they seem to relate to a number of familiar cognitive biases. While historians of philosophy have said remarkably little on these questions, we can turn to the next of kin, the historian, for the beginning of a discussion. McCullagh, for one, writes:

There are three commonly held reasons for denying the possibility of avoiding bias in history. The first is that historians’ interests will inevitably influence their judgment in deciding how to conceive of a historical subject, in deciding what information to select for inclusion in their history of it, and in choosing words with which to present it. The second is the belief that, just as a historian’s account of the past is inevitably biased, so too are the reports of events by contemporaries upon which historians rely. Some think there is no objective information about historical events which historians can use to describe them. The third is that, even if historians’ individual biases can be corrected, and even if facts about the past can be known, historians are still products of their culture, of its language, concepts, beliefs, and attitudes, so that the possibility of an impartial, fair description of past events still remains unattainable.

(McCullagh 2000, 52)¹⁴

Many will agree with McCullagh that avoiding biases in philosophical history is both possible and desirable. Indeed, it seems fair to say that unless they fully embrace the (relativistic) view according to which there is no unbiased standpoint when it comes to historical reconstruction,¹⁵ philosophical historians generally try to implement mechanisms that maximise critical distance and interpretive objectivity in order to meet certain standard expectations:

When one studies instances of historical writing, however, and the scholarly discussion of such accounts, one discovers that there are indeed standards which they are expected to meet, and that accounts which clearly fail to meet them are uniformly discarded. There is a sense in which descriptions of historical subjects, general interpretations of the past, and historical explanations are expected to be fair and not misleading. Descriptions, interpretations, and explanations that are not fair are often judged to be biased [...].

(McCullagh 2000, 39f)

McCullagh, of course, writes here about the practice of historians *tout court*. But it is safe to assume that historians of philosophy are subject to similar cognitive

shortcomings and desiderata. Given this, philosophical historians should seek to preserve their exegetical choice against the deliberate influence of subjective factors such as (a) what she, the philosophical historian, believes to be the right view about a philosophical issue (that is, considerations pertaining to her own philosophical commitments) as well as (b) what she considers to be her own relative intellectual proximity to the philosophers in question (that is, with whom she believes she shares or does not share these commitments).

Of course considerations such as the ones involved in (a) and (b) may nonetheless clandestinely play a role: we know that all sorts of clandestine biases may influence the historians' data and source selection.¹⁶ There is no reason to think that (a) and (b) should not also be included among them. In spite of these difficult and elusive problems, philosophical historians generally believe that it is possible to succeed in finding ways to minimise the role bias and prejudice play in the selection and interpretation of data, and that these challenges can at least in principle be mitigated by adequate critical scruples. McCullagh suggests that

what makes a history as objective as it can be is not detachment, but a commitment to standards of rational inquiry which is stronger than one's commitment to a certain outcome. Skeptics suppose that we cannot fairly consider possibilities that differ from those we prefer, but [...] historians often do precisely that. To be committed to standards of rational inquiry is to apply standards of rational assessment in the process of historical investigation. It is not to be detached, but to be committed to a certain way of thinking.

(McCullagh 2000, 55)

The problem for the historian of analytical philosophy who subscribes to (iii) is that she is, as regards these hermeneutic and cognitive challenges, in the worst possible epistemic position. The problem is not merely that the traditionalist historian is unavoidably subject to biases and that she may find it reasonably difficult to abstract from her own philosophical beliefs and preconceptions when trying to establish the best possible interpretation of the available data. This is *always* a problem and not restricted to the traditionalist historian. The crucial problem rather is that, if she subscribes to (iii), the traditionalist historian's own philosophical commitments are constantly and systematically called upon in the process of shaping her narrative. Presumably, she is thus systematically "primed" by considerations of her own commitments. Given the usual effect of priming on cognitive and evaluative tasks, it seems reasonable to think that whenever this benefits the coherence of her own philosophical commitments or confirms a hypothesis she already subscribed to, the traditionalist historian is more likely to misinterpret data, misunderstand an author's views, and/or altogether overlook important aspects of who and what counts as relevant in the history of analytical philosophy. The extent to which her exegetical choices are also steered by other concerns for (e.g.) exegetical neutrality, historical accuracy, and/or heuristic

fruitfulness in the process of a historical reconstruction will depend on a number of factors. But the risk remains that subscribing to (iii) will short-circuit attempts to establish the desired critical distance.

The Problem with (i)

If there is one assumption that does not seem to serve the purpose of producing an adequate understanding of the development, over the course of the last century and beyond, of that part of philosophy we nowadays call “analytical philosophy” it is the assumption that analytical philosophy is or arose from a *unique* tradition. (i) seems on the face of it incompatible with the richness and breadth of what is called analytical philosophy today. Interestingly, commentators often agree with this. Beaney (2013, 6), for instance, acknowledges both the diversity of what we call “analytical philosophy” today, the problem of explaining how it relates to “early analytical philosophy” and the necessity to be inclusive. But such admissions are often perfunctory. Beaney himself, for instance, nonetheless concludes:

It seems best, then, to respect the current use of the term as much as possible and treat analytic philosophy as a tradition that is healthier and stronger today, albeit more diverse, than it has ever been in the past.

(Beaney 2013, 6)

Once the diversity of analytical philosophy and the desire to be inclusive come into play, as they do for Beaney, the mistake is to think that the notion of a tradition can still do interesting work for the philosophical historian.

When it comes to devising syllabi and programs or producing job descriptions, philosophers organize research and teaching in a number of subdisciplines. Some of these disciplines—for example, philosophy of language and logic, metaphysics, philosophy of mind and the cognitive sciences, epistemology, philosophy of science, ethics, and value theory—are understood to be part of “analytical philosophy.” Such labeling is a complex and shifting phenomenon that is intimately linked not only to the evolution of theories but to that of persons and institutions as well. Consider that until the second half of the 19th century, philosophy defined the curricula of entire faculties in many European universities. In the course of the last 150 years, philosophy has become at once both more diversified and increasingly specialized. Part of the task of the historians is undeniably to account for this phenomenon. But, a traditionalist approach that assumes (i) is systematically ill-equipped to deal with the kind of historical complexity that is involved in the development, over long periods of time, of a broad range of theories and doctrines, practices, and institutions. As a result, traditionalist narratives rarely avoid overlooking key events or features in the history of analytical philosophy: they are not inclusive enough. At any rate, most current narratives notoriously tend to overlook the development of ethics, the philosophy of mind, the

cognitive sciences, metaphysics, and pragmatics—a failure which critics of analytical philosophy are not shy to stress—and seem incapable of (or unconcerned with) providing a systematic and holistic picture of the origins and development of contemporary analytical philosophy as a whole.¹⁷

Inclusiveness is key to understanding the history of analytical philosophy. Yet, inclusiveness, when it is valued at all, is often nominal. The suggestion that narratives in the history of analytical philosophy should pay attention to the development of, for example, philosophy of mind and cognition—the same holds as well as for metaphysics and ethics—does not sit well with some of the more orthodox conceptions of the “analytical tradition.” While the assumption according to which analytical philosophy is eminently antipsychologistic has been exposed,¹⁸ it long contributed to prejudice historians against the relevance of a study of theories of mind and cognition over the course of the last century and beyond. What early analytical philosophers may have thought about mind and cognition is still vastly unexplored. While some attention—indeed more and more—has been paid to the theories of consciousness, sensation, perception, judgment, and so on, of a select number of individual past analytical philosophers (including Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein), no attempt has been made to systematically situate these theories in a broader context, to understand how they developed and whether they continue to inform other aspects of contemporary philosophical theories.¹⁹ One tendency is to see the history of philosophy of mind as tangential to the development of analytical philosophy “proper.” But this approach is all the more suspicious that the study of mind is absolutely fundamental to analytical philosophy today and undeniably a “proper” part of it.

The narrow scope of historical investigations in analytical philosophy coincides with the fact that the attention remains predominantly focused on authors and problems associated with the foundations of mathematics and the sciences, mathematical and philosophical logic, as well as the study of language. This is not accidental: what putatively makes the analytical tradition distinctive—that is, what is assumed to be involved in (ii)—is almost invariably believed to be a commitment to the idea that logical and/or linguistic analysis play an essential role in philosophy. Assuredly, we can trace the development of work on these issues to a group of original thinkers of the early 20th century whose theories benefitted from mutual input and shared relevant intellectual and sociological background. But what made for the unity of this “early analytical tradition,” or even a watered-down version of what it originally consisted in, does not reflect what analytical philosophy consists in effectively today. The commitment to the predominance of one concern (for example, for the study of formal language or the formal study of language) as opposed to others (for example, for the study of mind, reality, or value) leads to impoverished accounts of what is putatively central to the discipline as a whole as well as to prejudice and misconceptions in determining the relative significance and value of the various research programs it involves, both historically and currently.

Illustration

Many historians of analytical philosophy, when pressed to explain what makes for the unity of the analytical tradition will resort to the idea that it is defined at least in part by the central role played by modern formal (mathematical) logic in its development. As Beaney puts it (but he is in good company):

If anything characterizes “analytic” philosophy, then it is presumably the emphasis placed on analysis. But [...] there is a wide range of conceptions of analysis, so such a characterization says nothing that would distinguish analytic philosophy from much of what has either preceded or developed alongside it. [...] What characterizes analytic philosophy as it was founded by Frege and Russell is the role played by *logical analysis*, which depended on the development of modern logic. Although other and subsequent forms of analysis, such as linguistic analysis, were less wedded to systems of formal logic, the central insight motivating logical analysis remained.

(Beaney 2016, §6)

Logic, in this account, is central to analytical philosophy and this for two reasons. On the one hand, as Beaney sees it, the revolution in logic at the end of the 19th century is what made the revolution in philosophy possible at the turn of the 20th century. He also suggests, on the other hand, that the continued input of modern formal logic is at least in part responsible for the progress of the discipline over the course of the last hundred years and beyond. Both claims are plausible. Nonetheless, both claims are also deeply problematic. The latter claim, in particular, is ambiguous. Indeed, there are different ways to interpret the idea that logic continues to play a central role in analytical philosophy. Take:

(Weak) Logic is a desirable/indispensible *tool* when it comes to clarifying and representing arguments and engaging in philosophical debates.

There’s nothing a priori wrong with the idea that (Weak) is generally held by *all* analytical philosophers, past and present. I, for one, think (Weak) is in fact true. Formal resources and logical analyses are not the prerogative of philosophical and mathematical logicians. Analytical philosophers of mind, cognition, reality, and value should certainly be sympathetic to contemporary logical theories, resorting to their resources at times, in some contexts, to contribute to an argument or a philosophical discussion. Whether they do, however, is an empirical question.

(Weak) however clearly is not what Beaney and others have in mind when they claim that logic is central to analytical philosophy. The assumption, rather, is that this centrality is not merely instrumental, and the underlying idea is the following:

(Strong) Logic—logical analysis understood broadly enough to include semantics—is *constitutive* of analytical philosophy.

By contrast with what is the case with (Weak), the notion that (Strong) is held by all analytical philosophers, past and present, is improbable: a cursory survey of opinion in one's department easily settles the question. So why does (Strong) seem plausible to historians of analytical philosophy? One hypothesis is that (Strong) is intimately tied to a twofold mistake. One assumes (i) that, at its origins, analytical philosophy was essentially immersed in a project defined by concerns for the foundations of mathematics and the sciences and the study of formal languages broadly construed and (ii) that at least some of the problems—and perhaps also the theories?—that defined the “core” of early analytical philosophy have persisted since its origins. Even assuming that (i) is right, for the sake of argument, (ii) certainly is not: (i) may arguably reflect *part* of the preoccupations of *some* analytical philosophers, both historically and nowadays. However, it obviously cannot be extended to all, not even to the relative majority.

More importantly, it is unlikely that we can account for the flourishing state of the discipline today if we assume that it originated in a starting point as narrow as the one implied by (Strong). (Strong) is the kind of preconception that leads one to overlook the various ways in which the study of, for example, mind, cognition, reality, and value shaped contemporary concerns and theories. For one who assumes that the origins of analytical philosophy truly reside in the relatively hermetic research programs generally associated with the logical and linguistic theories of Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, and the logical positivists, explaining how early analytical philosophers contributed to shape the field in its current state—a field whose boundaries extend to include the study of mind, cognition, rationality, action, reality, values, and more—is bound to be difficult.

One option for more orthodox historians of analytical philosophy is to argue that the history of analytical philosophy is the history of a tradition that no longer exists—but when did it end?—, not the history of what is called analytical philosophy today. This amounts to denying that (AP) is what they are concerned with. But certainly, (AP) is a concern and the problem is that in the absence of a sustained reflection on scope and method in the history of analytical philosophy, the subtlety would appear to be somewhat insincere. If I am right about the traditionalist conjecture, historians of analytical philosophy's practice is motivated by the belief that history has existential bearing of the kind reflected in (AP). One other option, and this is the one I favor, is to build on the observation that the range of disciplines, problems, and theories that evolved, developed, diversified, and/or specialized over the course of the last two centuries to constitute contemporary analytical philosophy was also initially quite broad, thus widening the scope of the historical investigation from the get go.

Conclusion

I've brought up two reasons to think that the traditionalist approach is ill equipped to produce an account of the way in which problems and theories have evolved, developed, diversified, and/or specialized in the course of the last two centuries to constitute what we understand analytical philosophy to be today, that is, to answer (AP). On the one hand, the traditionalist approach is, for systematic reasons, more liable to the kind of cognitive biases that philosophical historians in general seek to avoid. On the other hand, the constraints the traditionalist conjecture imposes on historical narratives are detrimental when it comes to be truly inclusive and to account for the history of a discipline whose richness and scope are so broad. In particular, the requirement that the story be that of a *unique* tradition whose core concern are reflected by (Strong) clashes with what is reasonably expected when it comes to accounting for the current state of analytical philosophy, that is, the complexity of its origins and the intricacy of the nexus of influence and interplay among the theories, individuals, and institutions that make it what it is.

In light of this, my suggestion is twofold. On the one hand, it seems imperative to do away with the idea that analytical philosophy should be dealt with any differently than what is the case for other philosophical periods. This calls, on the other hand, for a general and much overdue reflection on the purpose of philosophical history and the appropriateness of current methods. I've suggested above that the adequacy of a historical reconstruction is relative to the set of questions, explicit or not, by which it is guided. More needs to be said, then, minimally, on what counts as a "good" question in the history of analytical philosophy, and what counts as a satisfactory answer to that question.

I've given reasons to think that a traditionalist approach cannot give a good answer when it comes to understanding how analytical philosophy has become what it is today. Although I want to emphasize the need to be truly liberal and genuinely pluralistic in philosophical history, it seems to me that the history of analytical philosophy would benefit in at least three ways from an explicit denunciation of the traditionalist approach. 1) It would allow us to reach a more cohesive understanding of the development of a wider range of doctrines and theories in the context of a more inclusive and pluralistic conception of what defines analytical philosophy. 2) It would allow us to construct narratives that afford greater continuity with the history of philosophy at large. 3) It would provide the occasion of a reassessment of many of our assumptions concerning the relevance of individual authors—for example, non-male and/or non-German- and English-speakers, whose work have been ignored or downplayed, adjusting our understanding of their role in shaping the concerns and theories that defined theoretical paradigms today.

Notes

- 1 Calvin Normore (1990, 2016) makes a series of important distinctions that contribute to a better understanding of the distinctiveness and purposes of what historians of

- philosophy—as opposed to sociologists of knowledge and intellectual historians—generally do. See also Garcia (1992), Rée et al. (1978) and Rorty et al. (1984).
- 2 The questions that motivate a reconstruction should presumably be “interesting” and “relevant.” But there are good reasons to take interest and relevance to constitute broad parameters rather than rigid criteria. For one thing, what counts as interesting and relevant is not absolute and is bound to vary in different contexts. Besides, questions can be refined and reformulated at any point of the process and, at least in theory, even uninteresting questions could accidentally lead to interesting discoveries. While there is place for debate on what counts as a good questions and while there is virtue in insisting that disagreement be reasonable, philosophical historians should, here again, in any case be broad-minded. These are interesting issues, but in the benefit of space, they need to be addressed elsewhere.
 - 3 One may also seek to evaluate the value of a past theory in context. The dialectic here is somewhat more complicated, but it is not impracticable and questions such as ‘What should x’s contemporaries have thought of her theory?’ can be interesting and philosophically fruitful.
 - 4 This is not to say that Beaney’s recourse to the (a)–(b) dynamics is ultimately satisfactory, if only because they don’t amount to a genuine framework within which different approaches and methods can be assessed and compared.
 - 5 This point is made by Preston (2017, Introduction)
 - 6 More needs to be said on this on another occasion. There might be opposition to the idea of imposing rational constraints of this sort on historians coming from the post-modern corner. Indeed it seems to me that the postmodern position is that the best way to do away with such constraint is precisely to refrain from thinking history in narrative terms, which is consistent with what I am saying.
 - 7 A good example of this is the recent literature on American pragmatism’s influence on both logical positivism (cf. Uebel 2015) and Cambridge realism (cf. Misak 2013). See also the discussion forthcoming in the *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* (Uebel 2016; Misak 2016; Klein 2016).
 - 8 Cf. Lapointe 2011, 2014.
 - 9 According to Dummett (1993), analytical philosophy has its origins in a putatively Fregean linguistic turn. If we follow the proponents of the Neurath–Haller thesis (Smith 1996) and the idea of a “Semantic Tradition” (Coffa 1991), the history of analytical philosophy should also include Bernard Bolzano; Smith and Coffa would, however, disagree on the place of Brentanian Phenomenology in the story. Various “reconciliatory accounts” seek to understand the interplay between the analytical and continental (viz. phenomenological) traditions (Floyd and Shieh 2002; Haaparanta 1994), while preserving their assumed respective boundaries.
 - 10 Cf. Spade 2013, §1.
 - 11 Husserl was a student of Weierstrass in Berlin and dedicated his doctoral research to the *calculus of variation*. Throughout the 1890s he worked on logic and its philosophy in the context of the discussion on the foundations of mathematics. He is credited with having anticipated definitions of formal properties of axiomatic systems such as categoricity and completeness (cf. Hartimo 2007.)
 - 12 Cf. Preston 2007, 62.
 - 13 (i)–(iii) define what I understand to be the traditionalist approach. I take it that there are degrees of traditionalism. I also take it that (i)–(iii) are generally clandestine assumptions.
 - 14 McCullagh’s characterization of bias would benefit from a more systematic treatment and an adequate input from cognitive psychology. His work nonetheless documents the fact that, on the whole, historians believe that bias in history is bad and should be avoided. “There are several reasons for objecting to bias in history, and indeed in any accounts of everyday life. Biased histories generally purport to provide a fair account of

their subject but in fact do not, and so are misleading. This is intrinsically bad. Biased histories can also have bad consequences; biased accounts of what has happened usually result in injustice. Second, they cause misunderstanding of the structures and processes involving the things they describe, which can result in inappropriate strategies for altering them" (McCullagh 2000, 50).

- 15 As McCullagh (2000, 39) makes clear, for those committed to a subjective or hermeneutical approach to history, "The suggestion that historical descriptions, interpretations, and explanations could be biased would strike them as either self-evident or nonsense. It is self-evident to them that historians' accounts of the past reflect their personal interests and vision of past events; and they would think it nonsense to suppose that there is some objective standard of interpretation against which some accounts could be judged biased and others not."
- 16 For instance, implicit bias accounts at least in part for the fact that women, philosophers of colour, and other groups are vastly underrepresented, not only in standard historical narratives, but in bibliographies and anthologies as well.
- 17 Beaney's *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy* (2013) is a remarkable and much welcome exception. The type of inclusiveness practiced by Beaney is in accord with the spirit of my argument. My main reservation is that broad inclusiveness is incompatible with the idea that analytic philosophy is a "tradition."
- 18 See for instance Glock 2008, 125.
- 19 Research on the methods and concerns that underlie early theories of mind and cognition is often done by and for the benefit of historians of psychology or the sciences and is usually situated in the context of the theories of early psychologists (e.g. Wundt) and physiologists (e.g. Mach, Helmholtz). Or it is done by those who, for one reason or another, have an interest in examining the contributions of early phenomenologists (Brentano and his students) to the history of philosophy of mind. Although this has become a matter of debate, the predominant opinion remains the following: phenomenology per se constitutes a tradition *sui generis* whose relevance to understanding the development of analytical philosophy would be utterly peripheral if it were not for the fact that its historical origins coincide (geographically, chronologically, intellectually) with those of analytical philosophy. For a discussion of this precise question, see Lapointe 2017.

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